



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Meeting of UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS APPROVES THE DRAFT DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Ottawa, Monday, June 19, 2006 – The Bloc Québécois Indian and Northern Affairs Critic and MP for Abitibi-Témiscamingue, **Marc Lemay**, marked the start of the United Nations Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva today by reiterating the Bloc Québécois's support for the UN draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He called on the Canadian government to follow the recommendation of its Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and endorse the draft.

“The Bloc Québécois considers it vital for Canada to send a concrete message of recognition for Aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples,” Mr **Lemay** said, “each entitled to their culture, language, customs and traditions, and above all to their right to direct for themselves the development of their own identities. The United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples reflects this perspective, and Canada must support it.”

The Bloc Québécois Critic made his party's position clear at a press conference held jointly today with representatives of the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Amnesty International, and the other two opposition parties in the House of Commons.

He recalled that there is currently no universal instrument protecting the rights of Aboriginal peoples, who continue to be among the poorest and most marginalized on the planet. The international community, has made a commitment to end this situation, most notably in the 2005 World Summit Declaration, and has repeatedly asserted that adoption of a declaration on the rights of Aboriginal peoples is a priority.

“Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will make it possible to improve the lot of Aboriginal peoples,” Mr **Lemay** said, “while promoting the negotiated settlement of any conflicts that could arise. The unequivocal support of the Canadian government is necessary for adoption of the draft.”

Questioned in the House two weeks ago on whether the Harper government was going to support the draft Declaration, Conservative Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice declined to make any commitment, on the grounds that his government had to study it. This makes **Marc Lemay** nervous that Ottawa may at the last minute come up with a list of amendments that would result in delaying endorsement of the Declaration until much later.

“For more than 20 years now, the United Nations has been working on a declaration that would recognize the rights of Aboriginal peoples,” Mr **Lemay** said. “Twenty years of negotiations to reach consensus among the member nations of the UN so that justice can be done to their Aboriginal populations, and Jim Prentice tells us he still needs time to study the draft. This is clearly foot-dragging on his part, if not an unadmitted determination to derail the Declaration.

“The United States is using all possible political and diplomatic means to delay adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, because it would apply to their own Aboriginal populations. Recognition of these rights would be a huge nuisance for Washington. But because the Americans are not on the Human Rights Council, are they using Stephen Harper to do their work for them?” Mr **Lemay** concluded by commenting, “Stephen Harper had better establish the contrary, because if not it will be additional evidence that he takes his orders from the White House. But the opposition parties in Parliament should keep the spotlight on the government and make very clear that we will not allow the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, Quebec and the world to be abandoned.”

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