

**UNITED NATIONS**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2008**

**ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR**

Good morning to you all! My name is Conrad Polson and I am an Algonquin Chief from Timiskaming community in North Western Quebec.

I would like to thank the United Nations organization for giving me the opportunity to address this assembly on behalf of the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

I consider it to be very important to seize this opportunity to send a loud, clear message that at this very moment a scandal is playing itself out and we need to call on the United Nations so that all can be done to put an end to it. We must ensure that the wrongs we have suffered do not worsen so we don't reach the point of no return. In the short term, our languages and cultures are seriously threatened. What's at stake for our First Nations and humanity as a whole is the right to cultural diversity, which is preciously defended by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Year after year, the Canadian government continues to close its eyes on the recommendations of more than 35 years of studies, consultations and various working groups, most of which it has contributed to. All the data we have at our disposal from these numerous processes, demonstrates that in refusing to consider them, the Canadian government keeps our institutions in a highly precarious position.

- The government's own Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has indicated to the government the urgency of putting an end to the waiting lists of our students who want to follow post-secondary studies and who see their dreams dashed because of the underfunding of the post-secondary program. The same Committee spoke about the deplorable conditions of funding for First Nations post-secondary institutions, which have nonetheless proven their worth. This government prefers our youngsters to attend provincial postsecondary schools, which is in direct opposition to the rights to our own institutions that are defended by section 14 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- As far as our threatened languages are concerned, the situation is quite simply alarming. To show you just how little attention the government pays to this matter, the funding formula allows a mere \$400 per student for our languages and for the teaching of a second language, whereas the government of Quebec accords an amount of \$3,000 per newly-arrived student for learning the French language.

For us, it has become clear that for the Canadian government maintaining our institutions in seriously bad condition as regards to funding is another way to force their integration into provincial systems. We consider that the government therefore acts in flagrant violation of our rights not to be forced into integration and to be able to benefit from conditions that are favourable to the maintenance of our own institutions and education systems. Thus we understand better why the government refused to vote in favour of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government also has very recently threatened to cut funding to First Nations organizations that demonstrate to denounce these attacks against our rights!

It is urgent to act, and mount a strong opposition, because if nothing happens to put an end to the plans of the Canadian government, our language and cultures are threatened now more than ever. This is why today, on behalf of the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, I regard it as my duty to denounce this situation loudly and clearly before the Assembly of the United Nations.

We request the Canadian Government, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People to:

- Cease immediately its strategy of underfunding of our schools and our postsecondary institutions and students.
- Respect our right to have our own institutions.
- Ensure through a law and adequate funding, the protection of our languages.

Meegwetch!