

Message from the First Nations Education Council



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**Canada voted
against the
Declaration
of United
Nations
on the
Rights of
Indigenous
Peoples.
Why?**



First Nations Education Council (FNEC)

The FNEC is an organization regrouping 22 communities from eight Quebec First Nations. Founded in 1985, its mandate is to defend the rights of First Nations in education. To learn more about the FNEC, you can visit our Web site at www.cepn-fnec.com

Current context for First Nations education

- In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) published a declaration in principle in a historic document entitled *Indian Control over Indian Education*.
- The document reaffirmed the right of First Nations peoples to their autonomy in education to give their children an education that was in conformity with their values.
- The following year, the Government of Canada recognized this document.
- Almost 40 years later, most First Nations communities in Quebec have taken charge of the administration of their schools.

What happened to the resources that First Nations had the right to expect from the Government of Canada?

"It is rare to find unanimity on any topic in the realm of public policy. When it comes to Aboriginal education, however, the now overwhelming consensus of experts and officials within and outside government, of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians alike, defies the rule. All agree, quite simply, that improving educational outcomes is absolutely critical to the future of individual Aboriginal learners, their families and children, their communities, and the broader Canadian society as a whole." Chair of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Colin Mayes, February 2007.

A Canadian government which is threatening freedom of expression and wants to silence the voices of First Nations.

According to section 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: " Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. "

However, the current government is threatening to cut funding to First Nations organizations who wish to demonstrate to denounce what they consider to be an attack on the most fundamental rights of First Nations.

We must ask serious questions about how much respect the federal government has for First Nations right of expression and assembly.

And to top it all off, a vote against the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

After two decades of work, on September 13, 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by a margin of 143 votes to 4.

It is shameful that Canada should be among the four countries who voted against this declaration and that the present government should continue to exert pressure on other countries so that they too vote against this historic declaration.

The decision of Canada not to support this declaration goes against the most basic of human rights, not just in the opinion of First Nations, but also that of human rights organizations. It goes against the Canadian tradition of promotion of human rights on an international scale.

Canada, a fair and just country?

The February 2008 budget does absolutely nothing to correct these shortfalls which are well-known and unacceptable.

The 2008 federal budget in no way takes into consideration any recommendation of the many studies, consultations, working groups and parliamentary committees that the federal government itself supported over the last 35 years. All that the budget proposes is intended to forcibly integrate First Nations systems with provincial systems.

February 2008 budget: "Dedicating \$70 million over two years to improve First Nations education outcomes through enhanced accountability and by encouraging integration with provincial systems".

How can we not deduce from this that this process, which will be costly in human and financial resources, is nothing but a diversionary tactic?

Systematic maintenance of precarious funding conditions.

All evidence points to the fact that the federal government is deliberately maintaining First Nations schools in a precarious financial position in order to damage their effectiveness to discredit them and therefore promote a forced integration with provincial systems. This is the ultimate weapon with which the government intends to force the assimilation of First Nations.

By acting in this way, the Government of Canada is in flagrant violation of education law and the autonomy of First Nations recognized by their treaties, the Canadian Constitution and various international bodies.

A funding formula for First Nations schools that is completely out of date.

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- Never revised since it was established in 1988.
- Not indexed to the cost of living since 1996.
- Never modernized to take into account developments that have since occurred in education over the last 20 years such as the integration of technologies, vocational education, sports and recreation, libraries and many others.
- Whereas provincial schools across Canada receive an increase in funding of 25% to 175% to take into account specific conditions, the federal formula barely mentions similar conditions for First Nations schools (remoteness, minority languages, socioeconomic conditions, etc.).
- The federal government agrees to pay tuition fees up to twice as high to a provincial school to receive the same First Nations children and, in addition, requires no accountability from these provincial schools.

A government that has never financed the establishment of a genuine First Nations education system.

In Canada, all provincial schools receive support from education ministries, school boards, research chairs, etc. However, despite many studies recommending this, the federal government refuses to fund First Nations support organizations. First Nations communities are obliged to dip into the funding for their local programs in order to provide minimal financing for First Nations organizations to exist.

Forced to comment by the many studies that have described this situation, the previous Minister for Indian Affairs himself declared that there was no genuine First Nations education system.

A **lack of funding** prevented **2,858 First Nations** students from beginning post-secondary studies in **2007**.

Professional insertion in a knowledge-based economy demands more and more advanced and specialized studies. Between 2001 and 2006, as many as 10,589 First Nations students were unable to begin post-secondary studies due to a lack of funding.

Here is what the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development had to say about the situation in its February 2007 report:

«Achieving this objective will, in our view, require significant monetary investment now and in the years ahead to interrupt and reverse the present cycle of ever-increasing unmet needs of First Nations and Inuit learners for financial assistance, and to put in place a sustainable system, based on solid data, that is tailored to present and future needs. As we've stated, the cost of not making that investment now will only be compounded in the future.»

The Committee also mentioned its concern over the precarious funding conditions for First Nations post-secondary institutions. The FNEC, which has been working for several years to set up a post-secondary institution designed to serve First Nations students can also bear witness to this. Although the project is a determining factor to improve academic success and continuation with studies the federal government does not provide funding to support this.

In fact the government has continued to turn a deaf ear to all the recommendations of the Standing Committee for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Canada, signatory to the Convention on Cultural Diversity! But ... **what does it do** to protect **First Nations** languages and cultures?

Of the 50 languages that still exist in Canada, half are threatened with extinction in a few years time. More than a dozen previously flourishing languages have disappeared at the present moment and at least another dozen are threatened with short-term extinction. Only 3 will survive beyond this century if nothing is done to protect First Nations languages.

The figures below show what the federal funding formula contributes to the FNEC First Nations schools for their languages, compared to what the provincial schools receive to teach French language and culture to newly arrived immigrants. These figures speak for themselves as far as the insignificance of the federal funding is concerned.

- The FNEC member schools receive \$185 per student for the First Nations language and \$190 for the second language (some communities must teach two second languages).
- The province of Quebec contributes \$2,082 at the primary level and \$3,253 at the secondary level per newly immigrated student simply to teach them French language and culture.

It is a sure thing that Canada is condemning First Nations languages to extinction.

