**Open letter in support of Bill C-15**

“The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.” – Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Principles of Reconciliation, Principle # 1.

Parliament has an historic opportunity to advance reconciliation.

The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a consensus global human rights instrument, elaborating minimum standards for the “survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples.” Implementation of these standards is vital to improving the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world, and to upholding Canada’s solemn and urgent human rights commitments.

Members of the House of Commons and Senate must ensure that Bill C-15 (An Act Respecting the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*) passes into law before this session of Parliament concludes.

The *UN* *Declaration* affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples and the corresponding obligations of States. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was right to put the *Declaration* at the heart of its vision for reconciliation. The *Declaration* condemns the racist and colonial doctrines, laws and beliefs that continue to cause so much harm to Indigenous peoples. It also provides the principles and mechanisms needed to redress these harms, as well as safeguards critical to ensuring these violations are never repeated.

Canada has repeatedly committed to implement the *UN Declaration*. The federal government has even stated this commitment in the preamble to recent Acts of Parliament like the *Indigenous Languages Act*. Bill C-15 is about putting these commitments into practice.

* Bill C-15 underlines and reinforces the *UN Declaration*’s rejection of racism and other forms of discrimination, colonialism, forced assimilation and destruction of culture.
* The Bill requires the Government of Canada to work with Indigenous peoples to establish priorities and processes for implementing the *Declaration*’s diverse provisions – and to report annually to Parliament on the progress made.
* The Bill provides clarity around the fact that the *Declaration*, like other international human rights instruments, is already being used by courts to interpret Canadian law.
* In particular, the Bill also requires a collaborative process of legal review and reform to bring federal laws into line with the human rights affirmed in the *Declaration*.

These are important, practical and achievable measures that deserve the support of all Canadians.

We are mindful that a previous effort to meet Canada’s implementation obligations, Bill C-262, died on the Order Paper after unnecessary delay and obstruction in the Parliamentary process. We do not want any further delays in meeting Canada’s obligations to implement the UN Declaration.

Some Indigenous peoples’ governments and organizations, including some represented in this letter, are proposing or supporting amendments to clarify and strengthen Bill C-15. We believe that the Parliamentary process can accommodate a fulsome consideration of such amendments, while still ensuring that Bill C-15 is adopted before the end of the current session of Parliament.

Concrete measures to implement the *UN Declaration* in Canadian law and policy are necessary and overdue. Passage of Bill C-15 should be a top priority for all Members of Parliament and Senators.