

## The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).

The UN Declaration sets out standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world. It builds on existing human rights and fundamental freedoms, and describes how they apply to Indigenous peoples.

- ▶ The UN Declaration emphasizes that Indigenous peoples have the right to:
  - live in dignity.
  - maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures, and traditions.
  - pursue self-determination.
- ▶ The UN Declaration is a framework for reconciliation.
- ▶ The UN Declaration has been adopted by 148 nations around the world, including Canada.

### Article 13

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

### Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

## British Columbia's Implementation of the UN Declaration

In November 2019, the Province of BC passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) into law. That legislation:

- ▶ aims to create a path to respecting the human rights of Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ requires the provincial government to make BC laws consistent with the UN Declaration.
- ▶ states that this work should be done with Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ sets out that there will be an accompanying action plan developed with Indigenous peoples in BC.
- ▶ requires the Province to produce an annual report, describing how the laws of BC are being made consistent with the UN Declaration and how the goals in the action plan are being achieved.
- ▶ states that the government may enter into agreements with Indigenous governing bodies.

The 2021-2026 Declaration Act Action Plan includes 17 action items specific to First Nations education and languages. The actions relate to self-determination and the inherent right of self-government, ending Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination, and social, cultural, and economic well-being.

The UN Declaration and the Declaration Act represent critical commitments related to the rights of First Nations people. Educators in BC should be encouraged to learn about this legislation, and it is important that students are taught about those landmark documents, as well.

In addition to these important commitments, it is important to know ...

In 1959, the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, which states the right of the child to receive an education that will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, individual judgment, and sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, a legally binding treaty that is intended to protect the rights of children around the world. It provides that “in those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of Indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is Indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.” Implementation of the convention is overseen by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified on December 13, 1991.