



INUIT

Press Release

Inuit inspired by strong global support at high level UN indigenous peoples conference; disappointed with dissenting voice from Canadian government

New York – 25 September 2014 – The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) expressed its excitement today over an Outcome Document emanating from the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, a high level United Nations event that ended yesterday in New York.

ICC Canada President, Duane Ningaqsiq Smith, said he is very pleased that after several months of talks and difficult negotiations, world leaders and indigenous peoples came to a consensus at the UN General Assembly on how best to “make the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples work at national levels, how to practically implement it”.

Mr. Smith, however, muted his enthusiasm when asked about the Canadian government’s isolated take on the Outcome Document. “Yes, quite disappointing”, he said. “I’m not sure what our government is trying to achieve by standing up immediately in the UN General Assembly after a moment that should be celebrated by all sides, and do what they did”. The only other concern, on a very different issue, came from the Holy See.

What Canadian government officials did was object to the intent and details of the Outcome Document, noting in their statement that some of what was in it “cannot be reconciled with Canadian law”. Canada stood alone in noting it had particular reservations with the agreed-upon language of free, prior and informed consent, which according to ICC international Chair, Okalik Eegeesiak, “the government interprets as some sort of veto, that by all international legal standards has no basis in fact. They seem to be picking at this and that in the UN Declaration in order to justify its ongoing fence-sitting on this historic declaration that strongly supports, and supported by, Inuit and other indigenous peoples”.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples itself took 24 years to negotiate, most often with the backing of Canada until it came to its adoption in 2007, when it suddenly reversed its previous strong support. ICC Greenland President, Hjalmar Dahl, who was there in the early years of negotiations said, “informed consent is so crucial to the survival of indigenous peoples and this is one area in which we just cannot compromise any further”.

While deeply disappointed in Canada’s position, Mr. Smith agreed with Ms. Eegeesiak who said, “today we celebrate our achievements on the world stage and are content that the world has moved greatly forward the provisions of the UN Declaration . Inuit, as always, are committed to working with all respective governments, including Canada, in the implementation of the Declaration for the betterment of Inuit.”

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