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**Presentation to the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples**

Regarding Bill C-15:

*An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

May 28, 2021

* [Acknowledgements and identify role, and speaking for FNLC]
* Thank you to the Committee for the invitation to offer some brief remarks. I am honoured to speak on the topic of federal legislation to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the "Declaration").
* First, we speak in support of Bill C-15, as amended. We respectfully urge you to expeditiously advance the work of reviewing Bill C-15. In our view, the period of review should conclude. All ideas have been extensively explored and debated, and the Bill should be recommended to be passed. The Bill was improved at the House of Commons committee stage, and our collective focus needs to shift to implementing the UN Declaration through an action plan and other steps.
* We accept that it is not perfection of the text of Bill C15 but, rather, the opportunity for our Governments to implement the Declaration that is important. This Bill is a stepping stone toward our mutual reconciliation. This centimeter of progress will be followed by generations of kilometers.
* BC First Nations will continue to engage in the years ahead to implement UNDRIP in the best and most effective ways possible. We will work together to ensure that the Government of Canada and Parliament are doing the necessary work to uphold our Indigenous human rights, which are affirmed in UNDRIP and alive within our laws, policies and practices. There will be many more discussions and debates but we ***must*** to shift from debate to implementation. 14 years have passed since the UN General Assembly passed the Declaration, already far too much delay. We now fully expect a time of forward progress.
* On November 28, 2019 the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (or DRIPA as it is known) passed unanimously in the BC Legislature. We have made the shift from passage to implementation/action planning and the real and hard work is underway in BC. It is not easy work, but it is necessary work. The promises of improved lives through implementation make the sacrifices worth it. We need to have harmony and consistency with Canada, and a clear set of commitments by both the provincial and federal Crown, in relation to Indigenous peoples and our human rights.
* As members of this Committee know well, disputes between levels of government often stall progress and are a barrier to making progress. C-15 must be passed so that this will not be the case with the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. All levels of government, Parliament and legislative assemblies need to progress forward.
* DRIPA was widely supported by First Nations in BC. It represents a sea change from the BC Crown’s denial our title and rights. BC now affirms our existence as distinct Peoples and acceptance of the TRC Call to Action Call #43 to adopt and implement the Declaration as “the framework for reconciliation.”
* This work is especially urgent at the national level, as the human rights approach that C-15 will advance is necessary for redress of issues that are urgent from the past year. We have an awareness, after a long period of denial, of the extent and impact of the systemic racism and discrimination that Indigenous peoples experience in BC and across Canada, in seeking or receiving public services and supports. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how serious racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples is in public systems, such as in health and justice. It is urgent to put in place new human rights based tools and frameworks, such as will be born out of Bill C-15, so we can prioritize an end to this racism and discrimination, and to move beyond the legacy of colonialism and denial of Indigenous rights.
* Bill C-15, with improvements, is an important next step in Canada’s story. It is a long overdue pathway for change, predicated on respect for human and inherent rights, and repudiation and eradication of racist and colonial constructs and doctrines that have no place in this country or our relationships.
* Many of the improvements made to this Bill since First Reading were based on submissions brought from the First Nations leaders in BC. We are pleased the process has been open to and receptive of our input. We believe it is important to pass this Bill so that it is clear that Canada is repudiating doctrines advocating superiority like the doctrine of discovery and *terra nullius*. Old interpretations of Indigenous rights and the Crown-Indigenous relationship from an era based on colonial denial cannot continue. Bill C-15 is a new beginning and resets our relationships. This requires Canada to get its house in order, after a long period of evading and denying human rights, without delay.
* Bill C-15 will complement DRIPA in BC and contribute to a strengthened foundation for reconciliation in BC, where treaties were not concluded throughout the province and the Land Question remains largely outstanding, and where the implementation of the pre-confederation Douglas Treaties must be given due attention and commitment.
* The implementation of the UN Declaration through laws and action by both Canada and the Province of British Columbia will be a strong foundation for innovation and principled negotiations, improving and expediting the negotiation and conclusion of robust, enduring human rights-based treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements in BC.
* We know we will be back before you in the years ahead on the annual report on steps taking to implement the UN Declaration. I believe this Committee and others in the Senate and House of Commons will be examining issues relating to Bill C-15 in the future. You will have many opportunities to evaluate Canada’s progress on an action plan.
* In conclusion, we have to get from speculation and debate, to implementation and change. We need to move from fear-based thinking to an era of progress and prosperity that all of our children deserve.
* For this reason, the FNLC recommends you make your views known, and take no further measures or steps to delay the passage of Bill C-15.
* Mussi cho, Mr. Chair.