



December 3, 2020

The Honourable David Lametti, M.P., P.C.
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9

Dear Minister Lametti,

I would like to express the support of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) for Bill C-15 An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, tabled today in the House of Commons, as well as our hope that it be speedily adopted by both Houses.

As a human rights organization, CIJA sees the status of Indigenous peoples of Canada through the prism of human rights. And as long-time supporter of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – which we believe should serve as the foundation of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada -- we are of the opinion that the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) is the framework for reconciliation. Entrenching UNDRIP in Canadian law would demonstrate our collective commitment to upholding the promises made to Canada's Indigenous peoples. It would also send a powerful message to Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples that Canada is taking meaningful, tangible steps towards reconciliation.

Passage of Bill C-15 is particularly urgent now, as Indigenous peoples have been so significantly – and disproportionately - impacted by the coronavirus and are struggling with the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. Upholding the minimum human rights standards included in the Declaration will help inform a fair and equitable response to the COVID crisis.

While the Declaration is much more than this, we know that concerns regarding the language used in UNDRIP have been raised, specifically, whether the phrase "free, prior and informed consent" constitutes a "veto". It is our understanding, however, that there are substantial differences between "free, prior and informed consent", and a "veto" - a term which does not appear in UNDRIP. The phrase "free, prior and informed consent", as we interpret it, refers to meaningful and good faith engagement with Indigenous peoples on the issues which impact their communities. This is a clause we can all support.

As Canadians, ensuring the rights of Indigenous communities are upheld is in all of our interests. We look forward to Bill C-15 being speedily adopted by Parliament. Canada's Indigenous peoples have waited long enough.

Sincerely,

Shimon Koffler Fogel
President and CEO

CC Erin O'Toole, Leader of the Official Opposition
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader, Bloc québécois
Jagmeet Singh, Leader, New Democratic Party
Perry Bellegarde, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations
Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Clément Chartier, President, Métis National Council