



April 14, 2020

Indigenous Peoples' Rights Must be Respected During COVID-19

During the extreme challenges caused by the current threat of the coronavirus, our Nations and organizations are profoundly concerned with ensuring respect for Indigenous peoples' rights, particularly their rights to self-determination, health, security and well-being. Related Treaty rights of Indigenous peoples must also be fully considered.

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a network of Indigenous Nations, national and regional Indigenous peoples' organizations, human rights groups, and individual experts and advocates. The Coalition works to promote understanding and implementation of international standards for advancing the human rights of Indigenous peoples, in particular, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

In light of the highly infectious nature of COVID-19, and the particular threat that it poses to vulnerable communities with inadequate access to health care, housing, water and other essential services, it is imperative that federal, provincial and territorial governments respect the right of Indigenous peoples to set conditions of entry into their territories. Indigenous communities must be able to restrict access of industry workers, tourists, cottagers, and others. Where Indigenous communities have required suspension of certain activities in their territories, this must be respected.

Guidelines defining "essential services" during the COVID-19 crisis includes manufacturing in the oil, gas, mining and electricity industries. However, the risk to Indigenous peoples and their communities cannot be understated. Where Indigenous communities have required such industry to stop operating in their territories, this must be respected. It is a discriminatory double standard for federal and provincial governments to enact physical distancing measures and legislation in response to this pandemic yet allow hundreds of workers in camps to continue working.

In remote areas of Canada, large work camps house thousands of workers, with conditions that could spread contagious illness extremely quickly. Indigenous communities in such regions would be exposed to outbreaks of the pandemic. There is already unsustainable pressure on health care systems in remote jurisdictions. Every effort must be made to contain the spread of the virus and safeguard the lives of all. The extreme risk to Indigenous peoples and their communities cannot be understated.

Across all jurisdictions in Canada, people are urged to stay home. Surely exploration, construction and expansion of major resource development projects cannot be considered essential when they endanger the health and lives of persons in highly vulnerable Indigenous communities.

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (www.declarationcoalition.ca)

This statement was endorsed by the following organizations and individuals:

Amnesty International Canada / Amnistie
Internationale Canada

BC Assembly of First Nations

Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

First Nations Summit

Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) /
Cree Nation Government

Indigenous-Settler Relations, Mennonite Church
Canada

Indigenous World Association

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot, Canada Research Chair of
Global Indigenous Rights and Politics, University
of British Columbia

Dr. Wilton Littlechild, IPC, former TRC
Commissioner.

Dr. Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Expert
Member, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous
Issues

Ellen Gabriel, Kanien'kehá:ka Activist from
Kanehsatà:ke

For more information on implementation of the *UN Declaration*, please see our factsheets at
<https://www.declarationcoalition.com/more-info/>

- Interpreting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent FAQ