

Indigenous Working Group  
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough  
c/o 171A Rink Street, Suite 266 Peterborough, ON K9J 2J6  
www.peterboroughunitarian.ca 705-741-0968

January 10, 2013

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister  
Via: pm@pm.gc.ca, stephen.harper@parl.gc.ca

Mr. Dean Del Mastro, MP  
Via: delmad@parl.gc.ca, dean.delmastro@parl.gc.ca

**Re: Peterborough Unitarians Urge Meaningful Discussions, Actions with First Nations**

Dear Mr. Harper and Mr. Del Mastro,

It has been a year and a half now since members of our Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough's Indigenous Working Group met with Mr. Del Mastro to explore and foster understanding, reconciliation and right relations with First Nations.

As Unitarian Universalists from across the Kawartha region, we share with many Canadians the beliefs that all persons have inherent worth and dignity; that human relations should be based on justice, equity and compassion; that this world should be a community of opportunity and justice for all; and that we seek to live in peace with our fellow human beings and environment, as individuals and as peoples.

As we discussed then, we further believe that the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* provides a most useful framework for responding to challenging situations among our country's founding peoples. The Declaration is the most comprehensive, international human rights instrument explicitly addressing the economic, social, cultural, political, spiritual and environmental rights of Indigenous Peoples and is essential to the dignity, survival and well-being of Aboriginal peoples across our country. In its preamble, the Declaration is described "as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect". The rights addressed in the Declaration are consistent with other international human rights instruments that Canada already has ratified and is implementing in a myriad of federal laws, policies, treaties, agreements, and other instruments. The Declaration can also guide the federal and provincial governments in upholding the Crown's honour, a legal principle mandated by Canada's Supreme Court.

Along with the federal government's previous actions to recognize the tragedy of residential schools and to endorse the United Nations Declaration, we commend the Prime Minister for recently agreeing to meet with First Nations leaders this Friday to continue the dialogue on long-standing and outstanding issues. Nonetheless, we share with many the view that the processes for enacting Bills C-38 and C-45 were deeply flawed and carry profound implications for First Nations' rights and the integrity of our natural systems, on

which we all depend. Despite numerous submissions identifying problems with the legislation – that include geographical inaccuracies and redundancies right here in the Kawarthas – the legislation passed largely unaltered.

There is now a growing outcry across the country. Court cases are being launched (and won), protests are spreading, and international scrutiny is growing. The needs and concerns identified by First Nations and their allies are echoed by earlier Auditor General's reports and by the UN Special Rapporteur. As we Canadians continue to receive the benefits of treaties (where they exist), so do we also need to pursue our responsibilities and the nation-to-nation relationships under them. While more Canadians are becoming aware of the issues and more connected with First Nations, people of all backgrounds are coming to the collective conclusion that we can, and must, do better. Surely there is a better way that brings more voices to the table and fosters progress and collaboration rather than confrontation.

As Prime Minister, Parliamentary Secretary and our representatives in Ottawa, we urge you, government Ministers and other partners to make serious, sustained and systemic efforts to address Aboriginal rights, poverty, sustainable development, and related environmental and land issues. We urge you to do so in a way that upholds the honour of the Crown and the Canadian people, speaks to our highest moral principles, and embodies mutual respect and justice. We seek a path that is informed by the United Nations Declaration and recognizes the history and limited means of First Nations. Of course, Friday cannot be just a simple meeting. Rather, it needs to build on the Prime Minister's previous efforts to define a mutually just vision and launch an active process for urgent resolution of persistent and profound issues.

We look forward to learning how you and our government will further pursue true action on our common goals of justice, right relations, environmental responsibility, opportunity and well-being for the First Nations of Canada and, indeed, all Canadians.

Yours truly,



Indigenous Working Group  
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough  
Per: Ian Attridge

cc. Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada  
Hon. John Duncan, Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs  
Mr. Barry Devolin, MP  
Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, Assembly of First Nations  
Chief Phyllis Williams, Curve Lake First Nation,  
Chief Sandra Moore, Hiawatha First Nation  
Chief Jim Bob Marsden, Alderville First Nation  
Chief Tracy Gauthier, Scugog Island First Nation  
Canadian Unitarian Council and Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice