

COMMUNIQUE

HABITAT

United Nations Conference
on Human Settlements
Vancouver, 1976

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CANADA PRESSES FOR RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AT HABITAT

The Canadian delegation to HABITAT, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, has initiated several proposals dealing with Indigenous People. This action serves to give clear evidence of Canada's commitment to a just solution of the demands of her Indigenous People and to establishing a solid basis for international recognition of the special rights of the Indigenous People in all parts of the world.

Canada's initiatives relate to two basic issues: the special rights of Indigenous People and the question of land claims.

1. Special Rights

Canada has tabled the following amendment in the Principles section of the Declaration of Principles,

"Special rights, needs and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples must receive full consideration, with particular attention to the equality of Indigenous women."

The concept of aboriginal or special rights stems from the fact that Indigenous People were the original inhabitants of Canada.

The delegation is working with representatives of all regional groups to ensure that this amendment receives broad support from Conference participants.

2. Land

In the Programme for National Action, Canada, together with other like-minded delegations, has succeeded in amending the section dealing with patterns of ownership of land. This paragraph states that special attention should be paid to

"the land rights of Indigenous People so that their cultural and historical heritage is preserved."

In speaking to this amendment in Committee III the Canadian spokesman, Senator Ray Perrault, noted that:

"Land is an extremely important element of Indigenous claims in general, recognizing that the material standard of living is derived ultimately from the land and its resources.

Indigenous Peoples wish and deserve to have a role in determining the way in which the land and other resources are used, as well as a just portion of the benefits from their development."

Canada also amended a proposal which would have given special attention to the rights of women and minority groups in respect of legal ownership of land. In so doing, Canada changed "minority" to "disadvantaged" on the basis that several "minority groups" have privileged positions in various countries whereas "disadvantaged groups" would include Indigenous People.

In each of these major topics Canada has given special emphasis to the status and needs of indigenous women.

These amendments and proposals are being considered by the Conference. The Canadian delegation is vigorously working towards their acceptance. In addition, Canada is actively reviewing all conference documentation with a view to emphasizing the special rights, needs and aspirations of Indigenous People.