

UFCW Canada condemns Harper Government failure to support the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*.

As trade unionists we have committed our careers as activists to the promotion of both economic and social justice for working people in Canada and internationally. Through the United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW Canada), one of the largest private sector trade unions in the country with over 250,000 members, and its President Wayne Hanley, we have been afforded with the resources to do just that. In thousands of workplaces across Canada, the UFCW Canada and its predecessors has been working tirelessly for almost a century to effect the change required to ensure dignity and respect. This commitment is based on the premise that we must not only work for the betterment of working women and men generally, but as well, we must promote a genuine solidarity with those who have been historically oppressed by the Canadian system.

As we know as workers from diverse backgrounds, the fight for dignity, respect, and social and economic justice has never been trouble-free. However, unbreakable commitment can lead to tangible and encouraging outcomes. This was the case when the General Assembly of the United Nations overwhelmingly adopted the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* last September.

This landmark declaration sets out the individual and collective rights of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples, calls for the maintenance and strengthening of their cultural identities, and emphasizes their right to pursue development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations. It signifies a strong position in international law for the human rights of indigenous peoples after almost 25 years of contentious negotiations over the rights of indigenous people to protect their lands and resources, and to maintain their unique cultures and traditions.

At the UFCW Canada we would have expected Canada to be the leader in establishing and promoting the *Declaration* to member states. We were miserably incorrect. Not only did the Harper government fail to promote the *Declaration*, they were one of only 4 nations (along with Australia, New Zealand and the United States) of 147 nations voting that voted against it. All opposition parties in Canada have urged the federal government to change its position and support the Declaration. The Harper Conservatives have not relented.

Canada's position on the *Declaration* is nothing less than an embarrassing flip flop in the eyes of the world given that Canada was one of the original drafters of the *Declaration*. We are to support and promote Human Rights, not stifle their evolution. The reputation of Canada internationally has been significantly tarnished yet again.

It is within this context that the UFCW Canada stands in solidarity with all First Nations Peoples in demanding that the Harper government live up to the standards set out in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and reverse its position immediately.

The dignity and respect we demand as trade unionists and social justice activists for our members in their workplaces is the same dignity and respect demanded by indigenous peoples in the *Declaration*. If we are to ensure that the goal of a truly equitable society is one that is within our sights, whether it is for a sister at her workplace or at her home in a First Nation, we must maintain solidarity with one another and support each other in these goals. May we all remember this in the months and years to come.

Our struggles continue.