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For Immediate Release

NTI applauds the passing of landmark piece of federal legislation on Indigenous rights

(June 30, 2021, Iqaluit, Nunavut) On June 21, 2021, Bill C-15, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act*, received Royal Assent. The purpose of the *Act* is to bring Canada's laws into harmony with UNDRIP and to provide a way forward for the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples to work together to fully implement UNDRIP in Canada. Such implementation should ensure the consistent application of UNDRIP's principles, although Indigenous peoples across Canada—including Inuit—should not have to wait.

The *Act* requires the Government of Canada to take all necessary measures to ensure that Canada's laws are consistent with UNDRIP, which constitutes "the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples of the world".

The *Act* requires the federal government—in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples—to prepare and implement an action plan for achieving the objectives of UNDRIP. The action plan, which must be made public, must take measures to address injustices, combat prejudice, and eliminate all forms of violence, racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples. It must also include measures to promote mutual respect and understanding through human rights education.

UNDRIP was the result of a long, hard battle, spanning over 20 years, by Indigenous peoples around the world for the recognition of their rights. While UNDRIP was officially adopted by the United Nations in 2007, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States (who share similar colonial histories) refused to sign it at the time. In 2016, Canada changed its position, adopting UNDRIP and promising to implement it fully. Also in 2016, Romeo Saganash, former Member of Parliament, introduced Bill C-262, when he attempted to have Canada align its laws with the global minimum human rights standards for Indigenous peoples. Although the bill was passed in the House of Commons in 2018, it failed to make it through the Senate in 2019. "I acknowledge and extend my gratitude to Romeo Saganash who worked tirelessly not only to contribute to the drafting and negotiation of UNDRIP, but also to ensure that it was affirmed as part of the legal landscape in Canada," said Aluki Kotierk, President of NTI.

The *UNDRIP Act* affirms in its introduction the "urgent need to respect and promote the rights of Indigenous peoples affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangement". Nunavut Tunngavik has unfortunately had to utilize the courts on several occasions at great cost and delay to have governments uphold and implement their respective obligations in the *Nunavut Agreement*. For Aluki Kortiek, President of NTI, "Enactment of this *Act* is a win for all Indigenous peoples in Canada, including Inuit, and is a big milestone for Canada. This is hopefully an opportunity to ensure more respectful relationships towards Inuit, respect of our inherent and treaty rights as well as improvement of our quality of life and our fundamental human rights."

We call upon the Government of Nunavut to formally adopt and implement UNDRIP, as outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 43. The GN has a responsibility to actively protect Inuit rights as well as

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address injustices, combat prejudice and act to eliminate all forms of violence, racism and discrimination against Inuit.

Canada needs an independent Indigenous Human Rights Commission. While Inuit leadership did not get such a commission included in the UNDRIP Act, the legislation is a good start to meaningfully working together towards eliminating injustices Indigenous People face.

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UNDRIP:

http://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

UNDRIP Act:

https://parl.ca/Content/Bills/432/Government/C-15/C-15_1/C-15_1.PDF