



Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research

**Indigenous Youth Leadership & Implementing UNDRIP**  
Submission to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs -  
Study of Bill C-15, 8 April 2021

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## Executive Summary

CRE welcomes the opportunity to share the wisdom of Indigenous youth with the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs as part of your study of Bill C-15. Creating space for Indigenous youth voices to be reflected in the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a key step towards ensuring it is done in a good way. This submission reflects and draws on the words and wisdom of Indigenous youth who attended a CRE-hosted virtual engagement session in November 2020, focused on UNDRIP's implementation and how it will impact their communities.

The youth at the engagement were clear: implementing UNDRIP as Canada's framework for reconciliation now and into the future will not reflect their or their communities' needs and values unless it is done in a good way. This means a substantive, accessible, meaningful, and continuous engagement; for communities to be empowered to implement the Declaration in their own way; and clear milestones and progress updates that are identified by the communities directly impacted by UNDRIP.

Canada's commitment to *recognizing, respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of Indigenous peoples*<sup>1</sup> must be accompanied by measurable outcomes and milestones decided upon and led by those peoples. That the implementation of UNDRIP needs to be Indigenous-led is just one way in which this process must be decolonized; a decolonized approach must be distinctions-based, accessible, intergenerational, and community-centered.

From this discussion, three main themes arose, which will be unpacked further in the following pages:

1. **Meaningful Engagement:** Including taking the time to engage thoughtfully and carefully; communicating information in an accessible way that also reflects Indigenous ways of knowing; applying an intersectional and GBA+ lens throughout engagement; and not tokenizing youth.
2. **Decolonizing UNDRIP's Implementation:** Including distinctions based, community-led implementation; consideration of the specific implications of UNDRIP on an individual, community and legal level; and educating the non-Indigenous public about Indigenous rights and the importance of supporting this implementation process.
3. **Measuring Progress & Looking Beyond UNDRIP:** Including rigorous accountability measures and action plans with clear outcomes that are defined by Indigenous communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Justice Canada, "Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada", Updated May 2021. Retrieved [online](#).

## Meaningful Engagement

In describing what meaningful engagement means to them, there was widespread consensus among the group that there is a long way to go to ensure that these opportunities provide ample time and space to share their diverse perspectives and in order for them to feel respected and reflected in the process. Working with Indigenous youth to determine how to approach meaningful and reciprocal engagement is the first step to ensure that they feel seen in these important sessions. Feedback provided by the group indicated that, at a minimum, meaningful engagement with Indigenous youth needs to:

- Allow adequate time for youth to prepare to answer in-depth questions about the nuances of the policy or legislation in question - legislating UNDRIP will impact not only this generation but the ones to come, and the implementation process needs to respect that;
- Ensure that any materials presented for feedback are written in plain-language;
- Include specific discussion questions ahead of time that are cognizant of Indigenous realities and worldviews;
- Ensure facilitators leading discussions about Indigenous youth are either youths themselves or individuals with experience working and building trust with Indigenous youth, and are prepared to have a complex dialogue;
- Ensure facilitators allow for time after engagement sessions to provide additional input, either through structured debrief sessions or by providing a contact for youth to send feedback and input to.

Lastly, applying a GBA+ and intersectional lens that accounts for the distinct experiences from community to community, and between reserve and off-reserve, urban and rural, and remote and northern contexts is crucial at every stage of engagement and implementation.

## Decolonizing UNDRIP's Implementation

The most direct, efficient, and effective way to decolonize the implementation of UNDRIP and ensure Indigenous communities are invested in its success is to empower those communities to lead the process at every stage, including in interpreting the document itself.

While most of the group expressed feeling hopeful about the implementation of UNDRIP in general, nearly all participants expressed feeling skeptical or distrusting that it would be done in a meaningful way (as outlined above). Participants agreed that UNDRIP should be rolled out differently depending on the needs of communities, over time, and not in silos defined by the Government of Canada.

On the specificities of how UNDRIP could impact their individual communities, youth agreed that this will depend entirely on how the roll-out is done. Furthermore, clarity is needed about how UNDRIP will impact existing resource-sharing agreements, and more generally how and whether the concept of FPIC will be respected and enforced by the Government and by resource extraction industries.

The youth we spoke to agreed that discussing reconciliation necessitates a discussion of tangible actions related to decolonization and fighting white supremacy, in order to ensure the implementation works to solve issues, and not perpetuate them. Land justice should also have its own space within these discussions.

Finally, participants were unanimous that implementing UNDRIP needs to include a public education component that targeted non-Indigenous Canadians. The idea that non-Indigenous Canadians need to build their understanding of Indigenous peoples histories and realities as a central component to reconciliation is not a new one - RCAP (1996), the TRC (2015), and the 2019 Reconciliation Barometer all identified this as crucial to substantive reconciliation and change in Canada. UNDRIP's wide scope presents an opportunity to build this capacity to move forward together towards a shared goal of respecting the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples.

## **Measuring Progress & Looking Beyond UNDRIP**

In discussing measuring the progress of UNDRIP's implementation and any national action plan that accompanies it, the Indigenous youth who shared their wisdom with us made it clear that milestones need to be 1) intergenerational and 2) defined and decided by communities.

Discussion also centered around trust-building as an inherent part of measuring UNDRIP's implementation progress, and youth expressed that they would be encouraged if and when they see Government working across party lines to implement UNDRIP in a robust and community-based way. In relation to building trust, participants also expressed hopefulness that non-Indigenous allies will be a key part of ensuring that UNDRIP is enforced across industries and institutions.

## **Bill C-15**

CRE is encouraged by the momentum signalled by the introduction of Bill C-15, and sees UNDRIP's implementation as an opportunity to tangibly support the wellbeing of Indigenous nations and peoples in Canada. In particular, we appreciate that the bill closely resembles Bill C-262 and that the preamble acknowledges the calls to action of the TRC and the calls for justice by the MMIWG Inquiry, both of which call for the implementation of the UN declaration.

Also of note is preambular paragraph 10, which rejects all forms of colonialism and includes a commitment to advancing relations based on justice, equality, non-discrimination and respect for human rights. We would remind the Committee - and the Government of Canada - that such a decolonized approach must be community-based, accessible, and intergenerational. This is particularly germane to ongoing conversations about the nature and implications of UNDRIP's FPIC clause. Indigenous nations and communities should not be forced to choose between rights and safety, or economic prosperity.

While much of the issues discussed above are mainly applicable to the action plan mandated by the bill, we encourage the Committee to prioritize the needs, voices, and wellbeing of Indigenous youth and future generations in your discussions and considerations of amendments.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission notes that the Declaration sets human rights-based standards, and those standards need to be implemented for reconciliation in Canada to thrive in this century and beyond. Indigenous youth in Canada understand the importance and implications of this vision, including the legal complexities and ramifications UNDRIP will have on the collective and individual rights of Indigenous peoples in every area of life. Youth we spoke to were clear that those conversations need to include tangible, systemic reforms that address institutionalized racism and land reclamation/sovereignty. In pursuit of the goal of implementing UNDRIP in a way that centers and supports the voices of Indigenous youth and their communities, CRE makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Engagement: Create space for Indigenous youth to lead conversations about Indigenous youth**  
Allowing youth, ideally Indigenous youth, to facilitate conversations with Indigenous youth will yield a more fruitful and connective conversation, with clearer policy directions. This is important to all phases of UNDRIP engagement and implementation.
- 2. Implementation: Empower communities to engage and roll-out UNDRIP in their own way**  
Beyond having youth co-develop the implementation plan, allocating dollars to communities (whether on or off reserve, urban, rural, remote, northern, etc.) to have sustained dialogue with time to prepare for engagements and implementation planning sessions of their own design, with their own invitation lists, is critical to building trust and ensuring an ongoing relationship founded on respect and reciprocity.
- 3. Education: Educate non-Indigenous people about UNDRIP and Indigenous rights**  
For UNDRIP to have maximum impact as a framework for recognizing and upholding Indigenous rights, non-Indigenous people need to have an understanding of those rights and the structures they exist within and interact with. Beyond increasing an awareness and understanding of UNDRIP itself, this should also include treaty rights, the TRC Calls to Action, and the MMIWG Inquiry Calls to Justice.
- 4. National Action Plan: Allow communities to identify key indicators for the success of UNDRIP's implementation**  
Creating a brighter future for Canada through reconciliation requires clear, measurable indicators that can be assessed to determine whether UNDRIP is improving the socio-economic realities for Indigenous people in Canada. Allowing communities and nations to identify what those indicators and milestones are will better ensure the success of the framework and will create a structure for more robust and nuanced conversations about implementation, both short and long-term.
- 5. Accessibility: Ensure implementation, engagement, and education materials are plain-language**  
Any documentation or education materials should be written in plain-language to ensure that everyone can be involved in the conversation and stay informed about the progress; regardless of personal, professional, and educational backgrounds.

## About Us

CRE's mission is to provide pathways for Indigenous youth on their journey of self-determination and resiliency in an effort to advance reconciliation in their lifetime. This is achieved through programs and granting opportunities that support capacity building, cultural revitalization, network and solidarity. In the 2019 federal budget, the Government of Canada named CRE as a leading Indigenous youth organization to take up TRC Call to Action 66<sup>2</sup> for reconciliation and committed federal funding of \$15.2 million over three years (2019/2020 - 2022/2023).

To see a visual representation of the wisdom shared by the Indigenous youth who attended our virtual engagement session on the Implementation of UNDRIP please check out our [website](#).

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<sup>2</sup> CRE & Call to Action 66—Indigenous Youth and Reconciliation:

- Support the establishment of a distinctions-based national network of Indigenous youth;
- Help ensure that Government of Canada policies and programs are informed by the diverse voices of Indigenous youth; and
- Provide support to community events and gatherings for Indigenous youth and reconciliation-focused community-based Indigenous youth activities.