

Statement made by the Métis National Council
24th Session of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Agenda Item 6 e. The draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
August 4, 2006

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairperson, Members of the Working Group and all delegates. In the spirit of engaging in a productive dialogue, I would like to respond to some of the comments raised by Canada's statement on the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples made earlier this week. The Métis National Council strongly opposes Canada's decision to vote against the draft Declaration at the Human Rights Council in June 2006. As Canada noted, the new Human Rights Council *does* present "an historic opportunity and challenge for the international promotion and protection of human rights" – one that, in our opinion, Canada failed to meet when it voted against the Declaration.

We further take note of Canada's comments that it "will play an active and interested role in shaping the new Council, ensuring a place for indigenous issues". It is critical that Canada gives credence to these comments. Instead, these words ring empty, given their position (echoed only by Russia) at the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council to oppose approval of the Declaration. This stance ran contrary to the majority of the global leaders and to the voices of Indigenous peoples throughout the world, and indeed, contradicted their own positions taken only a few months prior at the 11th Session of the UN Working Group on the draft Declaration. We call on Canada to reverse this position at the UN General Assembly and support the adoption of the Declaration.

In Canada's statement, it also encouraged "indigenous groups to also be active in these deliberations and decisions". The Métis National Council has been an active participant in the Declaration and in international human rights fora related to the rights of Indigenous peoples for many years and we certainly intend to continue to work towards the advancement of the human rights of Indigenous peoples, including Métis peoples in Canada. In this regard, we call upon Canada to engage with the Métis National Council and other Indigenous Peoples in Canada, in an effective consultation process on the Declaration prior to the upcoming UN General Assembly where the Declaration will be voted on. Canada should initiate this discussion by providing a written analysis of its concerns, to be substantively discussed between high level and technical representatives of Indigenous peoples and the government of Canada.