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### *A Declaration of Indian Rights: The BC Indian Position Paper (excerpt)*

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UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

November 17, 1970

#### PREAMBLE

**T**hat Indians have survived the first one hundred years of Canada's history is miraculous indeed. This struggle has been handicapped by an apathetic, intolerant, and now intolerable Federal government and by totally incapable and ruthless Provincial governments. Governments generally have been disinterested in our problems and now the Federal government proposes to absolve themselves of any responsibility for our people by one stroke of the pen: the final stroke to cover all sins of omission and commission.

We Indians in British Columbia reject the Federal government white paper policy on Indians released in June, 1969. We disagree with any unilateral attempt by government to extricate itself from its obligations for our people. The special relationships that have developed through Indians and the Federal government carries immense moral and legal force. To terminate this relationship would be no more appropriate than to terminate the citizenship rights of any other Canadian. This historic relationship cannot be abridged without our consent. Instead, we propose a renewed constitutional commitment in light of modern conditions and we expect these and prior commitments to be honoured as any honourable sovereign nation should do for its citizens.

The principles and policies outlined herein are a record upon which our people believe overall legislation affecting Indians should be based without prejudice to our claims generally. These principles are suggested in good faith to avoid the kind of mistakes frequently made in the past by the Federal government for decisions and policies made without our direct involvement. These principles will benefit our people and are intended to improve Canadian unity, to bring the Indian and non-Indian peoples closer together.



First British Columbia Chiefs Conference Kamloops, BC. November 18–22, 1969.  
Photo courtesy of Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs.



In this paper we propose new and expanded programs and services for our people, and more delegation of authority to the local level to enable us to achieve optimum development of our human and our land resources at a pace consistent with our own plans. We need major increases in social and economic programs to help us in our adjustment to a rapidly changing society and increasing provincial services without prejudice to continued federal commitments. It is necessary for the Federal government to provide certain services for Indians but it is not necessary for the government to administer these services. There is no need for us to be deprived of self-determination merely because we receive federal monetary support, nor should we lose federal support because we reject federal control. We now want to make decisions, in the administration of our affairs, to select and control programs in a voluntary manner with the right of retrocession. We need a new and continued Federal government commitment for our people and for our lands.

#### SELF-DETERMINATION

Cultural pluralism is a source of national strength. Canada has a cosmopolitan population and we are proud of our part in it. We are proud of our cultural heritage, of our unique status and confident of the significant cultural contribution our people can contribute to the growth of this nation. Our record is one of enormous contribution to this country, to its art and culture, to its strength and spirit, to its history and to its sense of purpose. Would this Federal government deny us the opportunity to participate in Canadian cultural pluralism, to determine by our acts and our decisions what part we want to play in Canada's future? The Federal government seems intent on raping our culture and unique status, on wanting to destroy our identity as Indians. We reject this philosophy and demand our rightful place in society as INDIANS. We demand the right to determine our own destiny without jeopardizing our aboriginal rights and our special relationship with the Federal government.

Various policies are required to safeguard our unique Indian status and to preserve our valuable contribution to the multicultural ethnic structure of our nation. We demand that the two senior governments assume their rightful obligations and take appropriate urgent measures in their respective areas of jurisdiction to improve our economic and social conditions to permit us to survive and to grow with pride and a full stomach. We urge a greater allocation of resources to us to enable us

to develop our lands and our people, to enable us to better participate in the “Good Life” of British Columbia and in the “Just Society” of Canada.

It is evident that legislation for Indians is necessary and that the present *Indian Act* is unsuitable. New legislation and/or constitutional changes must provide us with educational and economical opportunity, and must provide more power and authority at the local level. The real issue is not revision of the *Indian Act* but recognition of the rights that have been denied us since Confederation and to enact constitutional legislation to guarantee these rights. We wish to pursue these rights in honourable negotiations and to have them provided to us without the need for harried confrontations.

We need legislation that will reverse the present paternalistic attitude of the Federal government, but the new arrangements entered into with the Federal government must not jeopardize in any way settlement of the aboriginal rights issue, and all rights due us as original citizens.

New legislation must reflect the real intent of past government obligations. It must guarantee Government commitments to its treaties, to its legislative commitments, and to verbal promises. It must provide the basis for equality and opportunity and reflect mutual trust and understanding. It must provide consideration for all people of Indian ancestry regardless of bureaucratic classification, and we must play a major role in defining these new commitments.

Areas of concern to which governments must now address themselves are:

1. Settlement of claims for the province of British Columbia.
2. Recognition of the various Indian nations.
3. Recognition of all rights due Indians such as: land title, foreshore, water and riparian rights, forest and timber, hunting and fishing on a year-round basis, mineral and petroleum, and all other rights basic to Indian life that are acquired hereditary, historical; usufructuary, moral, human or of legal obligation.
4. Establishment of an unbiased claims commission which will recognize these native rights and prepare just compensation awards for settlement of all land and other native claims.
5. Reconciliation of injustices done by the imposition of restrictions by all forms of Federal/Provincial legislation.

6. Complete and continued consultation with us during revision of pertinent legislation, and in setting policy on all matters affecting Indians by both senior governments including revision and alteration of existing programs.
7. Assumption of government administration at the local level.
8. A continued Federal government commitment to our people.
9. Equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of public activity; economic, educational, health, social, cultural, civic, and political.
10. Improved services and programs.

Above all, we as responsible individual citizens, as responsible band councils, as responsible representatives on the Chief's Council want to contribute to our own personal and co-operative group improvements, and want to co-operate with governments in determining how best to solve our many problems ...

*Source:* <https://www.ubcic.bc.ca>