



Draft Letter to Members of Congress Concerning the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Dear [*Senator or Member of Congress*]:

As you may know, President Obama declared the support of the United States for the most important rights of Indian and Alaska Native nations and other indigenous peoples of the world in 2010 when he announced support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is an historic statement of the rights of Native nations and Native individuals in the United States. It is a declaration that Indian leaders in this country proposed and worked to win adoption of for more than 30 years.

Most of the rights contained in the Declaration are already a part of United States law, but in certain important areas, the United States needs to change its laws and policies in order to achieve fairness for the Native peoples and individuals of this country. In several important ways, federal law concerning Native nations is not in compliance with the United States Constitution or with the provisions of the Declaration. For example, the federal government continues to take tribal property, especially aboriginal title lands, without compensation or due process. Congress continues to enact legislation affecting Indians and Alaska Natives practically without regard for the ordinary limitations of the Constitution. This discriminates against Native nations. Congress also frequently ignores our inherent rights of self-determination and our rights to exist as distinct peoples and cultures. These are important human rights that are now recognized and accepted by practically all countries of the world.

We are writing to you now to ask that you, in your work in Congress, respect and protect these important rights - the rights contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The ___[your Nation or Tribe] ___ has adopted a resolution supporting the Declaration and calling for respect for the rights it proclaims and calling for full implementation of these rights. We are attaching a copy of our Resolution and a copy of the Declaration as well.

We want to call your attention especially to [*Here, state whatever bill or problem you wish to mention, and point out the rights in the Declaration that seem to relate to that bill or problem. You may also mention examples of the federal government ignoring or violating the rights of your nation.*]

In the future, we will continue to contact you about proposed legislation or situations that affect our rights. We will need your help and support in dealing with such matters, and we will ask that you help us in seeking needed changes in federal law and full implementation of the rights contained in the Declaration. We look forward to talking with you about these matters.

Add any final points or concerns.

RTC/10-24-11