

## **PSAC Statement of Principles on Aboriginal Peoples' Rights**

The PSAC affirms that there are three distinct groups of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada today: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Each of these groups have their own languages, cultures, traditions and self-governing structures and each also has their own political agendas in their dealing with federal and provincial and territorial governments. The term Aboriginal Peoples should not be used to describe only one or two of the groups.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) supports all Aboriginal Peoples in their struggle for full access to all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We strongly believe that those freedoms include the right to preserve and strengthen their own political, economic, legal and cultural traditions and institutions.

As a union we believe that all Aboriginal Peoples have the inherent right to self-determination and autonomy. We also believe that it is a right of Aboriginal Peoples not to be subjected to any form of forced assimilation or integration. We recognize the devastating impact of Residential schools on the children that attended them, and the lasting harm to generations of families for years afterward.

We affirm that Aboriginal Peoples have the intrinsic right to be free from poverty. We acknowledge the historical inequalities and government inaction that have led to the widening economic gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples.

We believe that all Aboriginal Peoples should be free from all forms of racism, including environmental racism and discrimination especially where access to employment, healthcare, justice, housing, childcare, education resources and access to clean water are concerned.

We hold strongly the belief that the Canadian government must fulfill their historic treaty obligations and settle all outstanding land entitlements, nation to nation. Healing cannot begin until Aboriginal Peoples can re-establish full control over their communities, economies and cultural traditions.

The PSAC vehemently denounces all levels of government on their inaction in bringing justice and equality to Aboriginal women: They are among the poorest segment of the population; have higher unemployment rates and lower incomes; their life expectancy is lower and multitudes of Aboriginal women go missing or are murdered each year. Aboriginal women do not enjoy the same rights as Aboriginal men in terms of maintaining Indian status (as defined in the *Indian Act*) for their children and grandchildren. This continued economic and social marginalization only serves to feed the cycle of poverty and violence. The harms caused to Aboriginal women and children by patriarchal colonial policies and

discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act must be redressed and their equality rights must be fully respected

The PSAC acknowledges the significant cultural contributions that Aboriginal Peoples have made to Canadian culture. The union also recognizes that these contributions have yet to be adequately valued and acknowledged in our history books.

As a union we are also keenly aware of the struggles faced by Indigenous Peoples from around the world who continue to live in hardship, danger and poverty. It is incumbent on nation states to uphold for Indigenous Peoples the fundamental human rights that protect their ability to remain on their ancestral lands. Cut off from resources and traditions vital to their welfare and very existence, many Indigenous Peoples are denied such human rights as the right to clean water, the right to health, the right to housing, access to their traditional foods, medicines and cultural rights. Instead they face marginalization, disease and violence – and in some cases - extinction as a People. We call on the federal government to adhere to the principles in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to work towards the adoption of a convention on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The union fundamentally believes that every Aboriginal worker, no matter who the employer, has the right to union protection.

The union believes that to effectively challenge the inequality that exists for Aboriginal Peoples, both here and around the world, we must continue to grow our National Aboriginal Peoples' Network. Support mechanisms that allow for the communication, education and development of our Aboriginal members must always be a factor in decision-making. We will constantly strive to create opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples as members - and leaders - of our union. We must continue to be a leader in the Canadian labour movement in developing strategies and alliances with other unions to focus our energies where they are most needed. The PSAC will also maintain its commitment to work in coalition with progressive partners in the Aboriginal communities who share our vision of justice, equality and fairness to working people and their families.

Finally, our union also knows that it is not just Aboriginal Peoples who need to take on these challenges. Non-Aboriginal people continue to benefit from the land and resources that once rightfully belonged to the original inhabitants of Turtle Island. It is therefore incumbent on us a union to develop the capacity of our full membership to engage in the kind of awareness-raising, leadership and political action that draw attention and action to the struggles faced by Aboriginal Peoples.