

The Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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(Rapporteur's summary)

The confrontational relationship of government and Native Peoples, when Aboriginal groups took their case to the United Nations to embarrass the government, has largely given way to more constructive relations.

The Aboriginal peoples put more emphasis on collective than on individual rights. But the collective rights they seek - economic, social, and cultural - are achievable within the Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights. Since about half the Aboriginal population of Canada is under 15, "This is our last best chance to do something."

Canada is ready to sign a number of articles of the draft UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, although the UN does not appear to really want to deal with this area. The draft declaration represents an Indigenous wish list. Among the difficulties is defining what self-determination for Indigenous Peoples means. Canada wants to recognize collective rights such as property, language and culture, education, ways of conduct, laws and justice system. Some Native groups in the United States exert greater sovereignty than any Native groups in Canada.

Foreign Affairs has a two-track policy on Indigenous Peoples' interests: first, the rights-based issues; second, partnership projects abroad, as in Chiapas, Guatemala, the youth international apprenticeship program, and the World Bank program for contractors and small businesses.