

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 84th Session
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Statement of International Chief Wilton Littlechild, Chairperson, UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 3 February, 2014

Thank you Mr. President for the honour to speak on this very historic occasion.

Your Excellencies, Committee members, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. Today we witness a significant first, a first for Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations and indeed the world.

As Chairperson-Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of indigenous Peoples, on behalf of my fellow Expert Members, I applaud the members of the CERD and congratulate Mr. Francisco Cali Tzay on his election today as President of the CERD.

This is an outstanding and very important milestone in the journey of Indigenous Peoples towards full, direct and equal participation in decision-making on all levels. It is also significant in that Francisco Cali's skills, dedication and leadership qualities are being acknowledged by a UN Treaty Body that will open future opportunities for others.

My personal wish is that others in the UN System will look on this positive step forward and will also be guided by the right of Indigenous Peoples to full, direct and equal participation.

Francisco Cali has worked very hard. He has lived the dreams of our elders in a way that is consistent with and also implements the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Secondly Mr. President, allow me to also bring congratulations from my fellow commissioners Justice Murray Sinclair and Dr. Marie Wilson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Our court-ordered mandate to investigate and document the Indian Residential School Legacy – a government-legislated policy of assimilation which removed thousands of Indigenous children from their parents and communities, causing direct and intergenerational trauma. Francisco Cali served as an honorary witness to this process in 2011 at the 2nd National event in Inuvik. We have benefited greatly from his independent international expertise and his guidance that has moved us forward towards reconciliation.

As the International Chief for Treaties 6, 7 and 8, I congratulate CERD and President Cali Tzay in once again lifting up what the Treaty relationship is all about – partnership. Both the EMRIP and the TRC of Canada have referenced Treaties as a Solution and the UN Declaration as a framework for reconciliation. In our collective effort to eliminate Racial Discrimination we must respond to the call for us to work together. In this new era, with new energy, let us follow the instruction of a Cree Elder who said “Go where there is no path and leave a trail for someone else”. President Francisco Cali Tzay has lived that teaching, and we will continue to look to his

leadership. As a Mayan Spiritual Leader said in a prayer of gratitude on December 21 last year on the Bak-tun with the rising of the new sun, "things will get better". Things will get better.

I conclude with the words of one of the Great Chiefs of the land now called Canada, Chief Dan George, which are very appropriate for this momentous occasion. He said "there is a longing in the heart of my people to reach out and grasp that which is needed for our survival. There is a longing among the young of my nation to secure for themselves and their people the skills that will provide them with a sense of worth and purpose. They will be our new warriors. Their training will be much longer and more demanding than it was in the olden days. The long years of study will demand more determination, separation from home and family will demand endurance. But they will merge with their hand held forward, not to receive welfare, but to grasp the place in society that is rightly ours.."

Finally Mr. President, with your permission we, the Ermineskin Cree Nation, would like to gift you with a blanket which is an expression of great honor in our Cree way. I invite Councilman Daniel Wildcat and Andrea Carmen from the International Indian Council to make this presentation as I give thanksgiving in my Cree language.

Hai Hai, Thank you.