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Dene Nation Supports Long-Awaited Federal Legislation to Implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Yellowknife, Northwest Territories – December 7, 2020] The Dene Nation welcomes the introduction of Bill C-15 by the Federal Government in the House of Commons last week. The introduction of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into legislation is a significant step forward for reconciliation between Canada and First Nations peoples. The Dene Nation welcomes Canada's commitment to fully implement the legislation without qualification, and we expect that this will be reflected in Canada's actions, engagements, and relationships with First Nations peoples moving forward.

"For too long, the human rights of First Nations people have been discarded by Canada - and our people have suffered immensely because of it," said Dene Nation National Chief Norman Yakeleya, "The implementation of UNDRIP charts out a future for First Nations that puts their dignity at the forefront of the relationship with Canada. It sets us on a path to true reconciliation -- one where First Nations are not simply surviving, but are healing, growing, and are carving out a future for the next seven generations. This is a historic moment for our people."

The Dene Nation expects the implementation of UNDRIP to bring about long advocated for changes in justice that will complement the work already underway in areas such as the reform of the child and family welfare system including the full implementation of Jordan's Principle, actioning the Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, developing distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation, and the finalization of fair compensation for the victims of Canada's Day and Residential School Systems.

"All relations with First Nations in Canada must be centered around the principle of the inherent rights to self-determination and self-government. While the implementation of UNDRIP secures this vision for First Nations, it must be seen through shared prosperity between Canada and First Nations, as outlined in our many Treaties" continued National Chief Yakeleya. "The Dene Nation is committed to working together with Canada to ensure the success of Bill C-15 and to further ensure that the Government of the Northwest Territories remains accountable to its commitment to UNDRIP at the territorial level."

The commitment to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and the Duty to Consult must remain an integral part of Canada's relationship with First Nations peoples and communities. These commitments must be upheld as part of this new legislation. The right of First Nations governments to express their free will on actions on their own traditional territories is crucial to the principles of self-determination and self-government.

"We have seen in the past that the Duty to Consult and the obtaining of Free, Prior and Informed Consent have simply been box-ticking exercises -- this is unacceptable. With the implementation of UNDRIP, we hope to see Canada take their duties seriously and approach its relationship with First Nations peoples with the utmost respect for their human rights" concluded National Chief Yakeleya.

The Dene Nation welcomes the opportunity to work through the final implementation of Bill C-15 alongside Canada, and support the development of a tangible, results-oriented National Action Plan to follow the implementation of this ground breaking legislation.

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