



DEC. 10 United Nations International Human Rights Day

Sixty years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its famous declaration that, even today, remains as the most important statement ever to be formulated. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes “the inherent dignity” and “the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”

These remarkable words and the other principles contained in the declaration were adopted unanimously by all world governments and are so powerful that populations cite it and rely on it to protect them from state violence, genocide and degradation.

To Canada’s shame, the Harper government was one of only four countries that voted “No” to a Sept. 2007 international document that recognized indigenous rights and that was adopted by 143 countries. It finally signed the “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” late last month, after delaying for more than three years. The federal government’s obstruction of the equality aspirations of Aboriginal people continues to create misery for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

“This government is not the friend of equity-seeking Canadians,” says OFL President Sid Ryan. “Harper is the source of life-and-death problems encountered by millions of Canadians as they desperately try to overcome obstacles. We are the majority and it’s time to rid ourselves of a government that has no commitment to the notion of the “inherent dignity” of human beings,” says Ryan.

Vice-President Terry Downy, OFL spokesperson for the “Shannen’s Dream” campaign notes that the federal government’s appalling discrimination against First Nations children is preventing them from accessing a basic education.

Shannen Koostachin died tragically in a car accident last year at the age of 15. She had never seen a real school and spent all of her primary years in a makeshift portable set up on a badly contaminated brownfield. “We will not accept this – ever. Poisoned water, contaminated schools, poverty and hopelessness are the hallmarks of a federal government at war with its own population. It must end,” says Downey.

The UN declaration asserts the “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family,” yet every minute of every day, a woman or child is sexually assaulted; each week, 1-2 women are murdered by a current or former partner and violence continues to mount. Meanwhile, the Harper government has removed funding from the very women’s organizations that were the strongest advocates for equality and builds alliances with right-wing women’s groups that are contemptuous of true equality.

Explicitly listed in Article 23 of the UN declaration is the right to form and join trade unions; yet Canada and Ontario continue to thwart migrant farm workers’ attempts to unionize. The UFCW’s tremendous campaign on behalf of 100,000 Ontario farm workers has been blocked by governments’ indifference to the plight of the most defenseless and vulnerable global workers.

Other examples of Harper’s contempt for human rights include:

- Asylum-seekers fleeing persecution arrive on what used to be welcoming shores but now face indefinite detention.
- Over two million Canadian adults with disabilities lack support they need to participate fully in their communities.
- 36% of Aboriginal women live in poverty. In Ontario, 80% of Aboriginal women are victims of violence; 1 in 4 Aboriginal single mothers earn less than \$10,000 a year.
- Gay men, lesbians, bi-sexual and transgendered people were written out of Canada's citizenship guide until the government was forced to retract its deliberate omission.
- Canadian citizens and residents, particularly those who are racialized or Muslim, are too often marooned abroad and subject to renditions, wrongful arrest and torture, or are categorized as security risks rather than neighbours and co-workers.

“Today, Dec. 10, we are calling on all Canadians to take back their country,” says Ryan.

“We include this reminder for the Harper government from Article 25: ‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.’ “

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