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## MEPs: Canada's unprecedented commitments on indigenous rights await vigorous implementation

**Eight Members of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights visited Canada from 29 October to 2 November.**

After the visit, the Chair of the Subcommittee Pier Antonio Panzeri (S&D, IT) made the following statement:

"Our delegation visited Canada to have an exchange on human rights challenges and to learn more about the human rights situation of indigenous peoples (IP), notably in the light of Prime Minister Trudeau's commitment to reset the government's relationship with Canada's indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Metis).

Canada is a longstanding and like-minded partner of the EU in the area of human rights. Both sides are strongly committed to multilateralism and have established a close cooperation in international fora such as the UN Human Rights Council. Our will is to further deepen this cooperation and we concluded with our Canadian counterpart, the International Human Rights Committee of the House of Commons, to establish parliamentary cooperation between our committees, including possible actions to obtain the release of the imprisoned Saudi blogger and Sakharov laureate Raif Badawi.

The range of initiatives taken by the Canadian government to improve the situation of the indigenous population is impressive and we welcome the level of human rights institutions and the human rights legislation put in place, as well as Canada's commitment to fully implement the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples.

Even though we understand that overcoming the prejudices and the wrongdoings of more than a century of European settler colonialism and subsequent Canadian government policy against the IP is difficult and that the new political approach of truth and reconciliation takes time to become a genuine reality, we believe that faster action is needed at all levels of the government to speed up the implementation process.

As several of our interlocutors told us, the situation of IP remains Canada's most disturbing human rights issue: many indigenous communities still lack prospects of socio-economic development and access to basic human rights such as healthcare, education, housing and

drinkable running water. IP, notably women and girls, are much more often victims of trafficking, sexual abuses and other violent crimes, with almost no accountability of the perpetrators. IP are overrepresented in prisons and more easily put in solitary confinement. Access to justice is also problematic. A high rate of suicide among indigenous youth and an alarming number of indigenous children separated from their families by the Canadian social services have also been reported to the delegation. The traumatic legacy of residential schools remains very present. The situation of indigenous people with disabilities equally raises big concerns.

The Canadian authorities should therefore rapidly implement the legislation with adequate strategies and funding in order to foster decent jobs, self-determination as well as effective socio-economic development and welfare, while sharing natural resources in a fair and sustainable manner and fully respecting and promoting the IPs' cultural traditions and languages. In this context, it is necessary to ensure the right to free, prior and informed consent of the IP and to involve in the national dialogue with Prime Minister Trudeau every representative organisation working in the field, including the Native Women Association of Canada (NWAC). The Canadian authorities should also ratify the optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Other issues discussed were the Canadian immigration system, the increase of populist movements, the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Venezuela and in Ukraine (notably the attribution of the Sakharov prize to Oleg Sentsov), rights of persons with disabilities, violence against women, the LGBTQ2 population, CETA implementation from the economic, social and human rights point of view, as well as the new post of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE)."

### Background

The delegation of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament was led by MEP [Pier Antonio Panzeri](#) (S&D, IT), Chair of the Subcommittee, and included MEPs [Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio](#) (EPP, ES), [Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl](#) (EPP, DE), [Ádám Kósa](#) (EPP, HU), [David Martin](#) (S&D, UK), [Soraya Post](#) (S&D, SE), [Renate Weber](#) (ALDE, RO) and [Jordi Solé](#) (Greens/EFA, ES).

In Ottawa, on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people, the delegation met with representatives of the Canadian Departments of Global Affairs, Justice, Crown Indigenous Services and Immigration, of House of Commons Committees (Foreign Affairs and International Development, Justice, Indigenous Affairs, International Human Rights), of the National Inquiry Commission on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and also with the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Marie-Claude Landry. Moreover, the delegation met with Amnesty International, with indigenous peoples' organisations and with prominent academics such as Francois Crepeau, Pamela Palmer and Bob Rae.

In British Columbia, the delegation visited Victoria and Vancouver as well as the Squamish First Nation and notably had meetings with the speaker of the provincial Legislative Assembly Darryl Plecas, the Attorney General David Eby, with the Deputy Minister of Indigenous Relations Doug Caul and with the First Nations Chiefs Terry Teegee and Sidney Peters.

### Further information

[European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights \(DROI\)](#)

[Free photos, video and audio material](#)

### Contacts

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