

What does the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) mean when using the term self-determination? Self-determination refers to the right of a people to freely

(1) determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development; and

(2) dispose of and benefit from their wealth and natural resources. Under international treaty law, Canada is obligated to respect the First Nations' right of self-determination.

- Source: Assembly of First Nations, "Self-determination":
<http://www.afn.ca/Fact%20Sheets/first_nations_self.htm>

What Does Indigenous Self-Government Mean?

It is important for me to stress at this time that what Inuit achieved on April 1, 1999 was not self-government, but a legislated guarantee that Inuit would participate in a meaningful way in the decision-making process in the territory...

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement represented approximately 18,000 Inuit and covered nearly two million square kilometres. It is the largest land claim in Canadian history...

Signed in 1993, it is a modern treaty that both removes and defines the rights of Inuit in Nunavut. The Agreement reflects objectives and clarifies the rights to ownership and use of land and resources, and of Inuit rights to participate in decision-making concerning the use, management and conservation of land, water and resources. It also provides Inuit with wildlife harvesting rights and rights to participate in decision-making concerning wildlife harvesting. Inuit were also provided with financial compensation and a means of participating in economic opportunities. One of the last main objectives of this Agreement is to encourage self-reliance and the cultural and social well being of Inuit.

- Premier Paul Okalik of Nunavut, 2001, as cited on Nunavut website:
<<http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/premier/press/sg.shtml>>

The Métis seek rights under two categories, land and resource rights and self-governing rights. The Métis do not advocate sovereignty or separation from Canada. Instead, they desire greater control over their lives within Canada, the same objectives which motivated the 1869 and 1885 resistance struggles.

- Source: Métis Nation, Métis Rights and Land Titles: <<http://www.metisnation.ca/MNC/rights.html>>

A Declaration of First Nations

We the Original Peoples of this land know the Creator put us here.

The Creator gave us laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind.

The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities.

The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs.

We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial.

We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed.

The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination.

The rights and responsibilities given to us by the creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.

- Source: Assembly of First Nations, "A Declaration of First Nations":
<http://afn.ca/Assembly_of_First_Nations.htm>

2.2. Self-Determination

The arguments for recognizing that Aboriginal peoples are nations spring from the past and the present. They were nations when they forged military and trade alliances with European nations. They were nations when they signed treaties to share their lands and resources. And they are nations today – in their coherence, their distinctiveness and their understanding of themselves.

In international law, which Canada respects, all peoples have a right of self-determination. Self-determination includes governance, so Indigenous peoples are entitled to choose their own forms of government, within existing states.

Aboriginal peoples' right of self-government within Canada is acknowledged and protected by the constitution. It recognizes that Aboriginal rights are older than Canada itself and that their continuity was part of the bargain between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that made Canada possible.

- Source: *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, "Restructuring the Relationship":* <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/re1_e.html>