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## Protecting the environment while recognizing Indigenous rights

On June 21st, 2021, the federal government passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.<sup>1</sup> This UNDRIP Act provides a roadmap for the Ottawa and Indigenous peoples to work together to implement the Declaration. It emphasizes lasting reconciliation, healing, and cooperative relations.

### Government claims

The Ford government is promoting major new mineral extraction development in the Northern Ontario, with particular emphasis on the mineral-rich Ring of Fire. It claims that Ontario will respect Indigenous and Treaty Rights while providing all-season roads and jobs for remote First Nations communities. The Ford government also claims to respect Indigenous Rights on Indigenous territories across Ontario such as Line 5, nuclear waste disposal sites and the infamous Grassy Narrows mercury contamination site.

### And failures

The Ford government strongly objected to the federal government's UNDRIP Act in areas of federal jurisdiction on the grounds that UNDRIP defined the right to the crucial principle of *free, prior and informed consent* by Indigenous Peoples to any proposal affecting their territories; Ontario claimed that this would hinder government and corporate economic development plans. Ford's government has failed to introduce legislation to fully and effectively implement UNDRIP in Ontario as required by the United Nations convention process. It has ignored the call by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to fully implement UNDRIP



<sup>1</sup> <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/U-2.2/>



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in all jurisdictions in Canada (TRC Call to Action 43). Ford's government has chosen to deal with some First Nations in the Ring of Fire area while ignoring the call of other First Nations for a moratorium on all development-related proposals. Furthermore, the TRC showed how UNDRIP is the essential framework for establishing rights relationships in all matters relating to Indigenous Peoples.

For example, the Ford government cancelled an indigenous curriculum project in 2018, and a recent announcement that indigenous content will be added to K-3 curriculum by 2023 contained no commitment to funding and or indigenous leadership in creating curriculum.

## ***People and Climate First alternatives***

- !** **The full and effective implementation of UNDRIP in Ontario is the essential framework for redressing the historic and ongoing effects of colonialism and of establishing right relationships between settler governments/ peoples and Indigenous Peoples. The exercise of free, *prior and informed consent* can play a leading role in challenging fossil fuel and mineral extraction and transportation. It is inextricably linked to effective action to address climate breakdown.**
- !** **We need to push for the continued development of Indigenous education for all levels, not only in response to the TRC call to educate about residential schools but what we could learn by centering the Indigenous perspectives that should be at the core of any vision of climate alternatives: the interconnections of all living things and responsible stewardship of the earth.**