

For Immediate Release

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**President Obama Announces U.S. Support for United Nations
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

*National Congress of American Indians Calls U.S. adoption "One of the most significant
developments in international human rights law in decades"*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - December 16, 2010 - President Obama announced that the United States will lend its support to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) today during the second annual Tribal Nations Summit in Washington, D.C. Prior to this morning's announcement, the United States had been the lone holdout of the original four nations to vote against the adoption of the Declaration by the UN General Assembly in 2007; the other three (Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) have all since reversed their position.

"This is one of the most significant developments in international human rights law in decades. The United States and the Obama Administration have done the right thing today by joining the rest of the world in affirming the inherent rights of Indigenous people," said Jefferson Keel, President of the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest, largest, and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. "International human rights law now recognizes the collective and individual human rights of Indigenous peoples, including treaty rights, land rights, and the right of self-determination."

In delivering his remarks to hundreds of tribal leaders gathered for the Tribal Nations Summit, President Obama was clear that the aspirations in the Declaration were ones that all Americans should vow to uphold. Immediately after he made his announcement of support, the President emphasized that "what matters far more than words...are actions to match those words."

The Declaration, for the first time, gives international recognition to the collective human rights of Indigenous peoples, including treaty rights, land rights, and, perhaps most importantly, the right of self-determination. The Declaration calls for the maintenance and protection of Native cultures, languages, and identities; the fulfillment of treaty obligations by nation states; the equal treatment of and end to discrimination against Indigenous peoples; and the rights of Native peoples to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process and to be consulted on all matters that concern them.

The importance of the Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes is significant. While not legally binding in and of itself, it nevertheless performs the invaluable functions of gathering together in one document the basic rights of Indigenous peoples, educating the general public, and providing clear direction for those nation states endorsing the Declaration. The Declaration has considerable moral and political force and Indian nations will not hesitate to use the Declaration as the standard by which to measure the actions of the federal government.

About The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI):

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. NCAI advocates on behalf of tribal governments and communities, promoting strong tribal-federal government-to-government policies, and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights. For more information visit www.ncai.org

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