Defenders of the Land, a network of Indigenous communities and activists in land struggle across Canada, including Elders and youth, women and men, dedicated to building a fundamental movement for Indigenous rights, was founded at a historic meeting in Winnipeg from November 12-14, 2008. The network organized educational Indigenous Sovereignty Weeks across the country for three successive years, and issued a call for a National Day of Action on June 24, 2010, during the G-20 in Toronto, which saw a march attended by 10,000 people.

In 2008, Defenders of the Land developed a basis of unity and set of demands with the help of a broad range of land-based Indigenous activists. These demands - now slightly updated - are deeply in tune with the Idle No More movement and could serve as a powerful unifying force.

**Basis of Unity**

We, Indigenous Peoples of the territory known as Canada who are defending our lands and waters, our ways of life, and our rights, are of one mind that:

- We are sovereign nations. We have the inherent right to self-determination. We will determine our own destinies in accordance with our own customs, laws, and traditions - not in a way dictated to us by Canadian and provincial governments, and without interference by these governments.

- The rapport and relationship between Indigenous peoples and the lands and waters we have inhabited since time immemorial is fundamental and cannot be broken. The wealth of our nations must not only be measured in economic terms, but rather through the strength of our cultural knowledge and traditions, which are bound up with our relations to the land. The health and well-being of our peoples depends on our relations to the land, and the health of the land depends on its relation to our peoples.

- We have the right to subsist on, develop, and act as stewards of our traditional lands, in accordance with our inherent Indigenous rights and with historical treaties, including treaties signed between Indigenous nations prior to contact with Europeans. In particular, we have the inherent right to hunt, trap, fish, gather plants, engage in ceremonies, and build shelter and other structures on our lands, in ways that respect our cultures and are meaningful to contemporary Indigenous economies and cultural renewal.

- We have the right and responsibility to look after our lands and waters. No development can take place on our lands without our free, prior, and informed consent. “Self-government” that does not include control of our lands is no self government at all. A “duty to consult” that does not allow us to say “no” to development is meaningless.

- We reject the extinguishment of Aboriginal title through treaty, and any interpretations of historical treaties that falsely claim, against the united voices of our Elders and ancestors, that we have extinguished title to our traditional territories. We reject any policy or process that aims at extinguishing Aboriginal title, including contemporary treaty and comprehensive land claims processes.

- The Indian Act is a fundamental injustice and the product of racism and colonialism. It has no basis in any treaty and has been imposed on our peoples by Canada without our consent. It imposes on us a foreign system of government in which accountability is to masters in Ottawa and not to our peoples. It denies us our freedom to define for ourselves who we are and who are the members of our nations. Only Indigenous peoples have the right to make these determinations.

- We have the right to choose and practice our own systems of government, in accordance with our customs.

- We reject reforms of the Indian Act that are initiated by government and aim to obliterate our collective rights as Indigenous peoples under the guise of “individual rights” and hollow “self-government” provisions.

- Negotiations between Indigenous Peoples and Canada are nation to nation. Only individual First Nations have the right to negotiate, and only under the direction of their people - deals signed by leaders without the informed participation and direction of our communities are not legitimate.

- We have the right to maintain and practice our customs, languages, ceremonies, and cultures, and we have the right to full redress for historical and contemporary attempts to extinguish these through residential schools and other policies of assimilation and genocide.

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2. Canada comply with its international treaty obligations on the rights of Indigenous Peoples under the International Labor Organization’s Convention 169, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others.

3. Canada honour all its commitments and obligations under historic treaties with Indigenous Peoples.

4. Canada, with Indigenous communities, jointly change the federal policies on self-government, land claims, and historic treaties to recognize Indigenous rights and Aboriginal title, including the right to self-determination and the right to exercise free, prior, and informed consent.

5. Canada everywhere end its policy of assimilation of Indigenous Peoples within its borders and its policy of extinguishment of Aboriginal title.

6. Canada acknowledge and fully support our right as peoples to maintain and practice our cultures and languages, and give full redress and justice for its attempts to obliterate these.

7. Canada immediately cease the criminalization of Indigenous Peoples when they are exercising their rights to lands, resources, and self-determination, and direct the provinces to do the same.

8. Canada, through an independent body, provide financial support for Indigenous Peoples who are struggling to exercise or defend their rights.

9. Canada hold a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and involve Indigenous women in the design, decision-making, process and implementation of this inquiry, as a step toward initiating a comprehensive and coordinated national action plan.

10. Canada repudiate the concepts of Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery, which have been used to unjustifiably claim Indigenous Peoples lands, as factually, legally and morally wrong; and declare that such concepts must no longer form part of law-making or policy development by Canada nor be the basis of arguments presented to the court.

11. Canada restore all funding that was cut to Indigenous Peoples’ advocacy organizations and communities.

12. Canada repeal the provisions of Bill C-45, which include unilateral amendments to the Indian Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act, withdraw the existing suite of bills that would further amend the Indian Act and withhold any future bills until there is an agreed upon process between Indigenous Peoples and Canada.

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