Open Letter to Prime Minister Harper  
From: First Nation Leaders of Turtle Island  
Date: Tuesday, January 1, 2013  
Declaration of Action and Support Affirmation from Leadership of Turtle Island  

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario  

Many First Nations leaders from across Canada have gathered in recent days in Ottawa and through teleconference to discuss critical First Nation issues faced by Our People. First, the Chiefs all agree the legislative changes for Our People instituted by your government are not acceptable and amounts to a major assault on the First Nation-Crown relationship. Second, we are extremely concerned for the health and safety of Chief Theresa Spence during her hunger strike. After several days of talks we resolved to hereby declare unwavering support for her efforts. Through the consensus of those participants who came to the table, we uphold our sacred obligation as leaders to protect Our Land, Our People and Our Inherent and Treaty Rights. Chief Theresa Spence, through her efforts, elevates these sentiments and values to the highest example possible; therefore, we must stand firm beside her and her cause.

Prime Minister and citizens of this country, we urge you to observe the following:

Support for Chief Theresa Spence

First Nation Leadership of Turtle Island hereby affirm our complete commitment to Chief Theresa Spence as she carries out her hunger strike. This sacred assertion is one we will not interfere with, change, or alter. We remain steadfast, supporting her in every possible way to ensure her comfort and safety. We commit to carrying her message in the loudest and clearest way possible.

We concur with Chief Spence that all Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island hold both Inherent and Treaty Rights equally. We also acknowledge her plea for the country to recognize the deep reliance that humanity has on Mother Earth. We must protect the Earth and its water from harm or humanity will perish. The call of this one Chief to protect the land is consistent with the voice of all Chiefs in this country.

First Nation leaders echo Chief Spence’s direct message of Peace, Hope and Unity.
From the first day she peacefully occupied Victoria Island, Chief Spence has been consistent and articulate that peace remains the most critical principle in the foundation of First Nation Treaties in Canada. Her concern, held also by the majority of First Nations across Canada, is that the Crown has acted inconsistently with the principle of ‘peaceful co-existence’ since the Royal Proclamation of 1763; and that the continual injustice towards First Nations and systemic disregard of treaty obligations must end. The “Indian Policy” inflicted on our people cannot be the legacy we leave our children and it certainly must not continue to be the basis for the First Nation-Crown relationship in Canada. In your words during your Christmas address you said Canada is the most wonderful place to live and reflected on this country’s “good fortune.” Prime Minister, your words and the condition of the vast majority of First Nations in this country couldn’t be more far apart. This was not what our Ancestors intended for our People when they made treaty with your settler ancestors.

Our inherent right to the land predates the history of the settler society on what is now called Canada and to this end, we have never been conquered nor have we relinquished these inherent rights. It is time to honour the treaties – it is time to return to peace.

Chief Spence has also clearly stated that any changes to the Indian Act and attempts to unilaterally modernize this racist legislation overshadow any hope that First Nations have regarding reconciliation and recognition of self-determination. The legal duty to consult must be upheld as the basis of democratic justice for First Nations in Canada. To perpetuate legislation without consultation is to deny the inherent rights of First Nations. Hope can only be cultivated with the complete removal of the Indian Act. This legislation is politically violent and racist, it will remain that way even if it were altered. We as First Nations must design and implement our alternatives to this archaic and oppressive regime these must be our self-government approaches.

We further feel and agree with her sense of urgency for unity among Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island. To that end, she urges that First Leaders of Turtle Island must assert and uphold their obligations to their Citizens, their jurisdictions and their inherent and treaty lands during this great time of solidarity. As First Nation leaders, we will not succumb to any attempts to be divided. Her call for unity, combined with her sacred petition has re-confirmed what has always been true; we are one. First Nations will not succumb to the effects and impacts of any attempt to divide and conquer.

The history of Turtle Island and Canada has been told from the Eurocentric view for too long, Prime Minister. From this day forward make no miscalculation— as First Nation leaders in this country, we will increase our efforts to speak, teach, and reconfirm the truth about the Indigenous People of this country. In fact, the rest of the world is now closely observing. We support Chief Spence as she implores cooperative efforts of your government towards real and dignified change for First Nations. The rest of the world awaits your response as well.

Ending the Hunger Strike of Chief Theresa Spence
Chief Theresa Spence maintains that she desires to petition you in person, immediately. She feels so strongly about this that she is willing to assert her personal liberty to hunger strike on behalf of Indigenous People of Turtle Island. We support and urge you to meet with her and further that you confirm your commitment to a meeting with all Chiefs and Leaders of Turtle Island.

The focus of this meeting will be on the achievement of recognition of inherent rights and reaffirming the Spirit and Intent of our Treaty Relationship based on the principles of honour, peace, friendship and Indigenous sovereignty.

Our resolve is to continue praying and conducting ceremonies to support her safety and this most important message. We are also going to continue supporting demonstrations and calls on the Canadian government to make necessary changes in its relationship with First Nations. We firmly support a National Day of Action scheduled for January 16th 2013. We also realize that Our People and supporters for the liberation of Indigenous Peoples in this country continue daily assertions of peaceful demonstration.

Support for “Idle No More”

Chiefs and Leaders of Turtle Island recognize and commend “Idle No More” (INM). Our People; Elders, Youth, Children, Women and Men alike are our Citizens. This is an Indigenous assertion and First Nation leaders are not outside of or alienated from this movement in any way; we live and breathe in this movement with Our People. The movement and the vision of INM has reminded us that our traditional forms of leadership must be the basis for what gets us on an effective and meaningful path forward for the next generation. Our governance and jurisdiction belongs to the people and INM is a movement to propel a collective effort to work together towards achieving and re-establishing those governance systems for Our People and Our Nations again.

Idle No More has stated that it is a grassroots movement and we remain as one and part of the grassroots peoples. The Chiefs stood firm at the House of Commons doorway to send a message; grassroots provided the strength of a Peoples movement towards change. We, as First Nation Leaders remain steadfast in this direction, side by side with Idle No More. At the end of the day, we are all one, working for the betterment of Our People.

A Nation to Nation Voice and Direct Action

Canada, a time of renewal is upon this country and is prevalent throughout the world. Indigenous Leaders in this country must make clear that this land is not the personal possession of a political party or its government. First Nations or Canadians should not tolerate trade treaties, race-based legislation, and colonial policies designed to assimilate and strip away the rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island any further. We must focus on change for our
people, returning to the Spirit and Intent of the original treaties in Canada, not new deals with other countries to be granted legal land tenure for the sole purpose of their economic gain.

We urge Canada to remind its government to return to the Peace and Friendship treaties for that guidance.

Prime Minister, this week we will continue to speak out to Canada and the world; imploring other ‘Nation’ leaders like the Queen of England, President Barack Obama and Nelson Mandela to join the call urging Canada to correct the relationship that it has with the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island.

Prime Minister, Canada requires leadership that will address these matters in a manner that seeks constructive dialogue and collaborative efforts to change. I will again refer to your Christmas address in recent days; of all the joys of the season, perhaps none is more satisfying than the joy of giving. Not just the gifts exchanged between family and friends, but the gifts of time, money and effort many give to the people less fortunate than ourselves. We call on your congruent response; a response that upholds the professed values of Canada and a response that is consistent with the Honour of the Crown and the sacred covenant of treaties in Canada.

Work with us to end the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence. We fear for her health. We not only speak for our conscience and the pain we feel for her but we implore you for her Children. For the love of humanity – we make this plea.

Sincerely,

First Nation Leaders of Turtle Island