

## **The term First Nations can be confusing**

Collectively, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples constitute Canada's Aboriginal peoples or indigenous peoples. "First Nations" refers to specific indigenous groups in the land that is now known as Canada that are typically found south of the demarcation that separates First Nations culture groups from Inuit culture groups. The Inuit are also ancient inhabitants not included in the term First Nations because of their distinct regional, cultural, and linguistic differences.

First Nations is a legally undefined term that came into common usage in the 1980s to replace the term Indian band. Elder Sol Sanderson says that he coined the term in the early 1980s. A band is a legally recognized "body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Canadian Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act". There are currently over 600 recognized First Nations governments or bands in Canada, roughly half of which are in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia.

As individuals, First Nations people are officially recognized by the Government of Canada by the archaic terms registered Indians or status Indians only if they are listed on the Indian Register and are thus entitled to benefits under the often controversial Indian Act,[4] or as non-status Indian if they are not so listed and thus not entitled to benefits, according to the Canadian state. Administration of the Indian Act and Indian Register is carried out by the federal government's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

While still a legal term, the use of the word Indian is erratic and declining in Canada. Some see the term as offensive while others prefer it to terminology such as Aboriginal person/persons/people. Another reason for the decline in the use of this term is purely practical – according to the 2006 Census, there are now more Canadians who identify as being of East Indian ethnicity than there are members of First Nations. The use of the term Native Americans is not common in Canada as it is seen to refer to the Aboriginal peoples of the United States specifically. The parallel term Native Canadian is not commonly used, but natives and autochthones (from Canadian French) are sometimes used. Under the Royal Proclamation of 1763, also known as the "Indian Magna Carta", the Crown refers to indigenous peoples in British territory as "tribes" or "nations". The term First Nations is capitalized, unlike many of the alternative terms. Bands and nations may have slightly different meanings.

There is some controversy over the use of the term First Nations to either self-describe indigenous peoples within Canada, or for non-indigenous peoples to refer to indigenous peoples in this fashion. Under international law covenants, "First Nations" per se have no standing, whereas "indigenous peoples" or "nations" do.[citation needed] The Canadian government, many indigenous people within Canada, and many non-indigenous people use the term First Nations out of respect for the right of indigenous people to describe themselves. In general, indigenous peoples within Canada who identify themselves as

"First Nations" do not believe in the status of indigenous peoples as nation-states, while those who do not use the term, or insist on the term indigenous peoples, are sovereignties. There are also indigenous people in Canada who use the term First Nation for any tribal and/or nomadic ethnic group deprived of self-determination as a political recognition of colonization. Those groups work internationally on minority rights and self-determination.

A national representative body is the Assembly of First Nations. Its chief, Phil Fontaine, and many others, have argued that a citizenship-based membership for each First Nation is needed, instead of only memberships based on bloodlines, race theories, and records of ancestry. If one has to always be a quarter or eighth "Indian", then over a long period of time and mixing with others, there might be very few official "Indians" or natives. Citizenship could be based on other factors, like loyalty to one's community, knowledge and education about the history and politics of that traditional territory, language spoken, and close family and friendship bonds with community members.

Source: wikipedia.org