

Aboriginal Peoples and Canada

Taken from the Website of the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada

"Aboriginal peoples" is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants.

The relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Government is regulated by something called the "Indian Act". The act is explained here in a 2011 piece published by the CBC:

Since Canada was created in 1867, the federal government has been in charge of aboriginal affairs. The Indian Act, which was enacted in 1876 and has since been amended, allows the government to control most aspects of aboriginal life: Indian status, land, resources, wills, education, band administration and so on.

Inuit and Métis are not governed by this law.

In its previous versions, the Indian Act clearly aimed to assimilate First Nations. People who earned a university degree would automatically lose their Indian status, as would status women who married non-status men. Some traditional practices were prohibited.

Between 1879 and 1996, tens of thousands of First Nations children attended residential schools designed to make them forget their language and culture, where many suffered abuse. On behalf of Canadians, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal apology in 2008 to Canada's Aboriginal Peoples for this policy that sought to "kill the Indian in the child."

Some provisions of the Indian Act, however, were designed to protect the native population . . .

Many aboriginal people have an ambivalent relationship with the Indian Act. They denounce its paternalism, but are at the same time reluctant to give up its protections, such as tax exemptions in the reserves.

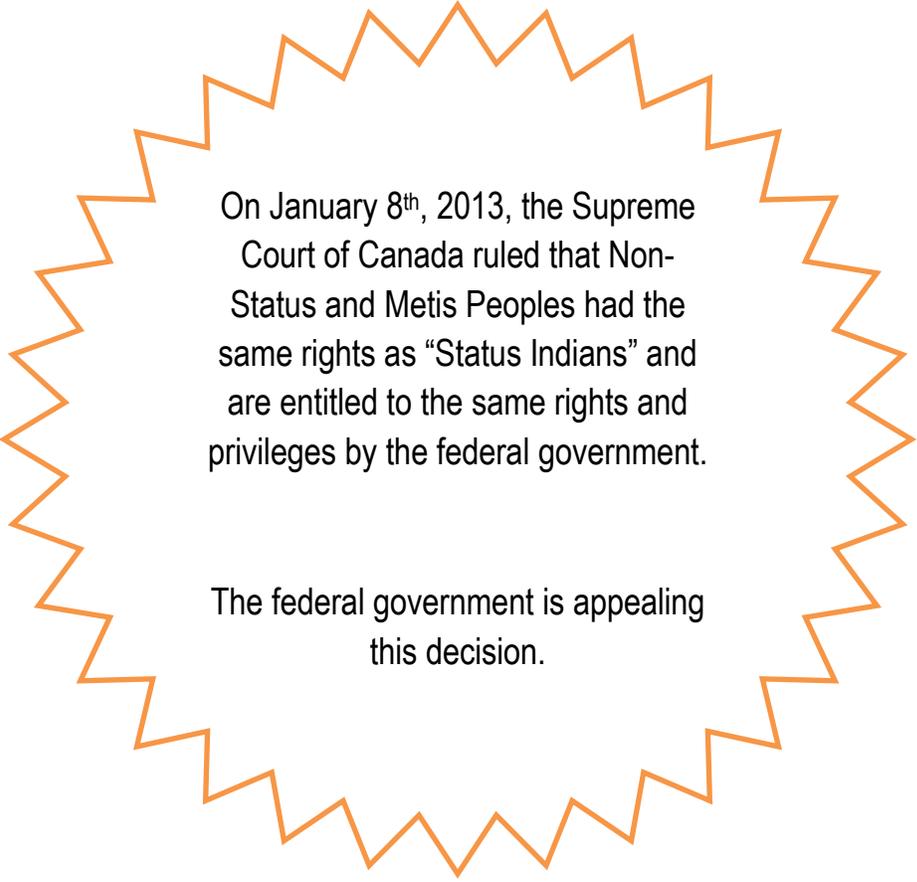
The Canadian Government recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people:

- Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations)
 - "First Nations people" refers to Status and Non-Status "Indian" peoples in Canada. Many communities also use the term "First Nation" in the name of their community. Currently, there are 617 First Nation communities, which represent more than 50 nations or cultural groups and 50 Aboriginal languages.
 - An individual recognized by the federal government as being registered under the Indian Act is referred to as a Registered Indian (commonly referred to as a **Status Indian**)

- **"Non-status Indians"** commonly refers to people who identify themselves as Indians but who are not entitled to registration on the Indian Register pursuant to the Indian Act. Some of them may be members of a First Nation.

- Métis

- Inuit



On January 8th, 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Non-Status and Metis Peoples had the same rights as "Status Indians" and are entitled to the same rights and privileges by the federal government.

The federal government is appealing this decision.