

# Change to citizenship oath proposed

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**O**TTAWA — New Canadians will soon swear to honour the rights of Indigenous Peoples if a proposed legislative change is adopted.

Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen has introduced a bill that contains new language for the oath of citizenship that includes a pledge for new citizens to faithfully observe the laws of Canada, including the Constitution, which “recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.”

Hussen said the proposal demonstrates the Liberal government’s commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and a renewed relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect and co-operation.

It is also a response to one of the 94 calls for action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which spent six years probing Canada’s residential-school legacy.

“New Canadians, when they take that oath, it means so much to them,” Hussen told reporters on Tuesday.

“The changing of the oath to reflect Call to Action No. 94 will embed in them an understanding of just how important it is for Canada to recognize and for new Canadians to recognize both the treaties and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples.”

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett said the change demonstrates to all Canadians, including the country’s newest citizens, that Indigenous and treaty rights are an essential

part of the country’s character.

The commission delivered its calls to action in December 2015, which included a recommendation to update the language of the oath of citizenship to include a recognition of Indigenous treaty rights.

When asked why the change was so long in the making, Hussen said he did consider it a priority, but that it took time to consult with all Indigenous partners and parliamentarians to ensure broad consensus on the wording.

“The issue was we needed to take the time to do it right and to get the right language, to get the most inclusive language available.”

Sen. Murray Sinclair, who chaired the commission, says he welcomes the government’s legislation to change the oath, saying it reflects a “more inclusive history of Canada.”

As for whether the bill will pass in the brief time left in the parliamentary calendar before this fall’s election, Hussen acknowledged it would require co-operation from all parties in the House of Commons and Senate to allow for speedy passage.

The Conservatives scorned that prospect.

“Conservatives support treaty rights and reconciliation, but tabling a bill at the last minute and which is subsequently not likely to get passed, due to the fact that there are only a few sitting days left in this Parliament, is not the way to do it,” Cathy McLeod, the Tory critic for Indigenous Affairs, said in a statement.

— *The Canadian Press*



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Sen. Murray Sinclair says the government’s legislation to change the oath of citizenship reflects a ‘more inclusive history of Canada.’