

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## NEWS RELEASE

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### First Nations Resolute they will Reform Indigenous Child Welfare in BC



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**Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC)** - First Nations leadership and child-serving organizations gathered over the past two days, along with representatives of the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada - to discuss the current crisis in Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia.

Deb Foxcroft, President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council stated, "First Nations did not come here to simply talk. We do not want to waste our time, and more importantly, our children's time. Our chiefs didn't travel here from the West Coast of Vancouver Island to simply talk without action."

The Gathering had more than 400 participants who heard from and dialogued with high-profile and powerful voices such as Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, and Dr. Wilton Littlechild, as well as youth who shared the profound impacts of being in state care and being "aged out" of the system unprepared for adult life.

First Nations are resolute in re-assuming full control and exercise of their inherent right of self-determination over the health and well-being of their children, families and communities.

The First Nations Leadership Council – comprised of the political executives of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Assembly of First Nations, and First Nations Summit – will advance, with First Nations and willing partners, an action-oriented strategy to support the transition to culturally appropriate Indigenous child and family welfare approaches. First Nations were unified in the call for wholesale reform of the current system that was born from colonial policies that have utterly failed our children and families.

The First Nations Leadership Council extends an invitation to both Canada and British Columbia to honourably engage in a robust and meaningful process to advance reconciliation in Indigenous child and family welfare.

A solid framework exists for this work: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and related jurisprudence, and the recent decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision in *First Nations Caring for Our Children Society*. The Tribunal determined that the federal government has been racially discriminating against 163,000 First Nations children and their families by providing flawed and inequitable child welfare services, and by failing to implement Jordan's Principle to ensure equitable access to government services available to other children.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated, "First Nations will no longer tolerate unilateralism by the Province or Canada. Today is a turning point. We will build on the monumental win by Dr. Cindy Blackstock and the First Nations Caring for Children Society, and the recommendations of Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, and ensure respect and equity for our children. A First Nation child deserves nothing less than any other child. We continue to reject the top-down approach of the Plecas report, which was created without input from First Nations, and call for a new approach to Indigenous child welfare."

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit, continued, "With the recent Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision, we don't need to wait for the provincial and federal governments to recognize that our kids are equal – instead, our task is *implementation*. Racially-based fiscal policy is an immoral, outdated and unacceptable form of institutionalized racism. I am hopeful that the Province and Canada accept our invitation to embark on a new chapter in Indigenous child welfare."

Mary Teegee, Chair of the Delegated Aboriginal Agencies Directors' Forum, stated, "BC First Nations expressed deep concern that the \$5.3 million federal budget allocation for First Nations Child and Family Services program in BC was determined without proper consultation with First Nations or First Nations child and family service agencies in BC, and is insufficient to provide immediate relief from the discrimination experienced by First Nations children and families. We also note that Delegated Agencies are funded substantially less by Canada than what the Province receives from Canada for First Nations children in care who are not from communities with a Delegated Agency."

Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson, BC Assembly of First Nations, concluded, "Actions speak louder than words. Our children are in crisis. We need real partnership for the betterment of our families and for our communities. Our children should be front and centre in everything we do. Our next steps will be critical in advancing change, and we need a new fiscal relationship for improved outcomes for our communities. With very little commitment on behalf of the Province, this reflects that the status quo is maintained. I fully and utterly reject that we can't do better than the status quo, we must do better and we must look within, to our cultures, to our laws and to our ways of life to ensure the protection, safety and security of our children and families. We absolutely must do what is necessary to work towards the betterment of the future of our children."

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.*

**For further comment please contact:**

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