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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Federal unilateralism will not achieve reconciliation in First Nations education

(Coast Salish Territories / Vancouver) The political leadership of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit and the BC Assembly of First Nations, along with the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, are calling on the Government of Canada to set aside its current Blueprint for First Nations education legislation and to work in partnership, and in the spirit of reconciliation, on any legislation or policy aimed at the education of First Nations children.

The First Nations Leadership underscored the support for the important work already well under way in BC through the BC First Nations Education System that is having positive education outcomes for our children.

Grand Chief Edward John, Political Executive Member, First Nations Summit, remarked, "We are witnessing this week public attention being focused on reconciliation, particularly in the context of the unilateral and destructive education policies of the Government of Canada in the past that attempted to "kill the Indian in the child" through the Indian residential school system." He continued, "There are critical lessons to be learned from the past and First Nations reject any unilateral development of education policy by the Government today that is aimed at our children. Reconciliation requires an entirely new approach that ensures the full and effective participation of our people in the design, development and delivery of education to our children."

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, "First Nations in British Columbia strongly support the BC First Nations Education system, and the work of the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) to advance and protect this System. It is a community-driven System that has been in development for decades and is premised fundamentally on First Nations control of First Nations education." He went on, "While the Government purports to have heard First Nations' issues and concerns, they have failed to engage in co-development of legislation and have failed to demonstrably address the many issues and concerns being raised by First Nations. In particular, the federal proposal lacks a clear commitment to sustained and needs-based funding, including for language, culture and technology."

National Chief, Shawn A-in-chut Atleo noted, "We are at a critical point, where we can either repeat mistakes of the past or move forward in a constructive and progressive partnership to achieve improvements in education for our children. First Nations stand firm and united in the fundamental tenet of achieving First Nations control of First Nations education because this is our inherent responsibility." He added, "We are finally at a place where the education of our children has the attention of the Government and all of Canada. Yet still, while we agree on the need to do more for the education of our children, we must still engage in the hard work cooperatively and respectfully on how this can and must be achieved"

Cheryl Casimer, Political Executive Member, First Nations Summit, stated, "There is tremendous expertise in our communities around First Nations education and we have offered to provide this expertise and guidance in a partnership approach to education legislation and policy." She continued, "It would be a shame and disservice to our children to not run with this opportunity to jointly design an approach that responds to First Nations aspirations."

BCAFN Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould added, "In BC we have developed our own solutions to First Nations control over First Nations education, solutions that are working and need to be supported. Any new federal legislation concerning the education of our children must be carefully developed in partnership with First Nations, well considered, and above all else ensure that the interests of the child are paramount." She added, "A society that allows another society to educate its children and abdicates its responsibility does a disservice to its own future. We cannot allow this to happen to our peoples."

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