

FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

NEWS RELEASE

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BC First Nations Applaud Canadian Human Rights Tribunal: Federal Government must take immediate action to address inequalities in First Nations Child and Family Funding

Coast Salish Traditional Territory (Vancouver) – First Nations Summit leaders are applauding today's decision by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in *First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v. Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)* - which has confirmed that funding provided by the federal government for on-reserve First Nations child and family services through the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAC) is both disproportionate as well as discriminatory.

"The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has confirmed what we have known for many years, the federal government has been failing to provide adequate and equitable funding for child welfare services for on-reserve children. This is unacceptable and intolerable, especially considering there is already a shortfall in overall funding and capacity", said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit (FNS) political executive.

"We encourage the Liberal government to heed this important decision and take immediate steps implement all of the recommendations put forth by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (FNCFCFS) and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to address the fiscal inequities, deficiencies in human resource capacity and overall child and family funding insufficiencies are fully addressed", added Chief John.

"We commend the work of the FNCFCFS and the AFN for bringing forward these complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in an effort to shine a light on these important issues and for being a voice for our children. In particular, we commend the steadfast determination and hard work of Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of FNCFCFS, who, despite federal intimidation and harassment, was undeterred in her resolve to fight for equitable and appropriate funding for First Nations child welfare for our kids across Canada", added Cheryl Casimer, also of the FNS political executive.

In an extensive pre-election letter to the First Nations Leadership Council (FNL) dated October 8, 2015, the Liberal Party of Canada wrote;

"It is profoundly disappointing that the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society had to turn to the Canadian Human Rights Commission to seek justice and equality of child and family services on reserve. A Liberal government will immediately remove the 2 per cent funding cap on First Nations programs and will ensure that all First Nations receive equitable funding for child and family services on reserves. When it comes to deciding where investments should be made, we will look to First Nations' communities and leadership for guidance. First Nations communities know best what will work for them and a Liberal government will be a willing partner to



implement First Nations led approaches to the challenges they face. We are open to extending the Enhanced Prevention Focused Approach for child welfare funding to British Columbia, if that is the approach BC First Nations themselves decide would best meet their needs.

Liberals also know that, if we are to truly deal with the over representation of Indigenous children in care, we must also address the root causes - including high levels of poverty and a disproportionate lack of educational and economic opportunities for Indigenous people in Canada. The Harper government has slashed federal resources for First Nations communities and over \$1 billion of government funding intended for Indigenous Peoples has been allowed to lapse since 2009. In contrast, a Liberal government will invest an additional \$2.6 billion in core First Nations education over the next four years, and establish a new broader fiscal relationship with the Crown that provides First Nations communities with sufficient, predictable, and sustained funding, which reflects the actual costs of program delivery. A Liberal government will immediately re-engage with First Nations in a renewed, respectful and inclusive Nation-to-Nation process to advance progress on priorities identified by First Nations, including housing, infrastructure, health and mental health care, community safety and policing, child welfare, and education. We will make sure the Kelowna Accord – and the spirit of reconciliation that drove it – is embraced, and that its objectives are met in line with today's challenges."

"In light of today's decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, we challenge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Dr. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of INAC, to immediately follow through on the important commitments outlined in the October 8th Liberal Party of Canada letter to the FNLC and to work with First Nations and Indigenous organizations across Canada to establish the short and long term fiscal and capacity building plans that our children so desperately need. Our children must never again be used as pawns within the federal fiscal framework", concluded Robert Phillips of the FNS political executive.

Background

In 2007, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations filed a human rights complaint against the federal government, alleging that Canada's failure to provide equitable and culturally based child welfare services to First Nations children on-reserve amounts to discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin. After several unsuccessful efforts by the federal government to have the case dismissed on legal technicalities, a hearing on the complaint began on February 25, 2013 at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and was completed on October 24, 2014.

For further resources, including backgrounders and recommendations, please visit: www.fnwitness.ca.

For a copy of the October 8, 2015 letter from the Liberal Party of Canada to the First Nations Leadership Council visit: <http://www.fns.bc.ca/pdf/M-LPC-Response-Election-2015-Reponse-du%20PLC-Election-2015-First-Nations.pdf>.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

Contacts:

Colin Braker, Communications Director, FNS

604-926-9903 or 604-328-4094