

First Nations Summit

STATEMENT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
FEBRUARY 27, 2018**

Comments by BC Liberal MLA Mike Morris show clear lack of understanding

Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, British Columbia – The First Nations Summit is astounded and disappointed by the clear lack of understanding shown by BC Liberal MLA Mike Morris following his suggestion in the BC legislature, that the Government of BC should not invest in Indigenous language preservation because, in his opinion, the funding would be better spent hiring police to crack down on crime in First Nations communities.

Mr. Morris' insensitive comments show a complete lack of understanding of the importance of Indigenous language and culture, particularly in BC, which is home to sixty percent of Indigenous languages in Canada. We sincerely hope that Mr. Morris' comments are not reflective of the BC Liberals view.

Language is the essence of Indigenous cultures and fundamental to our survival, dignity and well-being as Indigenous peoples. Language is our inherent right and is central to our cultural and spiritual identities as First Nations. Furthermore, language plays a fundamental part in indigenous people's identity by connecting individuals to communities, therefore providing cultural and spiritual context in the daily lives of Indigenous peoples.

The First Nations Summit has long maintained that the federal and provincial governments have both a moral and fiduciary duty to First Nations to help protect, revitalize and maintain our languages. Language rights, as part of cultural rights, where they are inadequately recognized or supported, must become important government public policy priorities. There has long been a need for political will and concrete actions to provide the resources needed to preserve and develop this heritage, in particular Indigenous languages.

We are now at a time when both the federal government and the BC government have stepped up and signaled this political will through their respective commitments to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, both of which have key recommendations regarding the importance of preserving indigenous languages.

We commend the BC NDP Government for recognizing this in last week's provincial budget where \$50M was identified and committed to go towards the preservation and protection of Indigenous Languages in BC. The preservation of Indigenous language and culture will have a much more significant and positive effect in our communities than sending in a larger police force to instill colonial law and order, in a system that continues to fail Canada's Indigenous people.



For further information:

Grand Chief Edward John, FNS Political Executive:	778-772-8218
Robert Phillips, FNS Political Executive:	778-875-4463
Cheryl Casimer, FNS Political Executive:	778-875-2157

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 information on the First Nations Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

Background

The UN Secretary General stated on May 16, 2011, at the opening of the 10th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues that an Indigenous language dies every two weeks. Additionally, the report of the 15th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues stated that Indigenous languages form the bedrock of continuity for the survival and well-being of indigenous cultures from one generation to the next. The 15th session report further stated there is a growing crisis of indigenous language loss and in many cases an urgent, even desperate, need to preserve and revitalize languages. It is estimated that more than half of the world's languages will become extinct by 2100.

Indigenous languages in BC make up an integral part of Indigenous identity and culture and of Canadian heritage. Unfortunately, all Indigenous languages in BC are critically endangered. As noted by National Geographic, BC has been identified as a world language "hotspot" where First Nations languages are literally "racing to extinction." Also, according to the Report on the Status of BC First Nations Languages 2014, fluent speakers of BC First Nations languages make up 4.08% (5,289) of the total population reported, with 59% of fluent speakers aged 65 and over. First Nations language learners make up 9.14% of the population, while only 52% of communities have any sort of language curriculum materials for teaching languages. Action is needed now to support the revitalization of BC First Nations languages. The preservation of Aboriginal languages is absolutely a priority for First Nations in BC.

Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [the Declaration] calls upon nations to take effective measures to protect the right of Indigenous peoples:

to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Furthermore, Article 25 of the Declaration states:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their distinctive spiritual relationships with their...lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations..."