



MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release
September 29, 2005

**Statement by the First Nations Summit Political Executive
on the Signing of the BC Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Agreement**

North Vancouver, BC – On behalf of the First Nations Summit, we wish to congratulate the Governments of Canada and BC for coming to an agreement for Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) in BC.

The development of high quality services for our children in this province is long overdue and is of high priority to First Nations communities and our people. We cannot go wrong when we invest in our children. In the long term it will provide improved social and economic circumstances for our people.

We see this as a significant opportunity to engage both levels of Government in a sustained dialogue leading to the delivery of holistic, comprehensive, culturally responsive and integrated early childhood education, care and development for our children.

In addition to meeting the immediate needs for early learning and child care, the enhanced Early Learning and Child Care initiative is intended to be a longer-term strategy to support lifelong learning and labour force development.

Given the number of communities and children to be served, and the scale of the challenges we face, to properly support healthy First Nations children and prepare them for participation in the labour force as young adults, every effort must be made to ensure that adequate resources are made available.

The Government of Canada has targeted resources - \$100 million over 5 years - towards a First Nations ELCC specific initiative intended to integrate the current basket of Federally-funded programs. However, that allocation represents only 2% of the total ELCC budget and comes nowhere near the level of investment that is required to achieve the ELCC goals. While that might seem to be a lot of money, the limitations are apparent when one considers the needs to be met and recognizes that the funding must be divided amongst 600 communities, over 13 provinces and territories, over a 5-year period.

Provincial Governments will be given the largest amount of the funding, to support the delivery services in BC communities. **We expect that funding will be made available to our communities**, at levels at least reflective of the relative size of our child population, and with consideration to the needs to be met.

The Governments of Canada and BC are to be commended for recognizing the importance of investing in early childhood development. However, they need to appreciate the scope of the work that must be carried out in First Nations communities. The challenges are daunting but not insurmountable.

BC is one of the most culturally diversified areas in the world, with significant geographic challenges to service delivery.

Although we face many challenges, we have significant strength in our families, communities and Nations. Despite huge efforts on the part of families, communities and committed individuals and First Nations organizations, much more must be done to raise a generation of healthy children. Everyone has a role to play.

The devastating conditions confronting our children require a holistic solution. We can get only part of the way through early childhood development. Our Treaty, land claims and self-government negotiations, and our health care, education and training, employment and economic, justice and political development initiatives will also play a significant role in meeting our child development goals.

Research done in this province has demonstrated that children and youth are much healthier when they live in communities that follow their traditions, which are active in the struggle for Aboriginal title and rights, with higher levels of sustainable economic development. That's how our efforts are inter-related and that's how all of our initiatives will support the healthy development of our children.

We are encouraged by the new relationship we are building with the Province of BC. We believe that that new relationship will make a significant contribution towards the healthy development of First Nations children in this province.

We also need to be mindful of Canada's obligations in the international arena, such as its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and "A World Fit for Children", especially in light of last year's OECD report which found that Canada comes up short in the support provided for early learning and child care. The recommendations of OECD study can be summarized as the need for more funding, spent more efficiently, especially for Aboriginal children. We hope that Canada's 2006 report to the UN will be able to point to significant progress in meeting the needs of First Nations children.

Short, mid and longer-term action plans are needed, with the benchmarks to be achieved, to implement the OECD recommendations on a timely basis, especially for First Nations children who are the children most at risk in Canada and most in need of effective, culturally-responsive early intervention, development and support.

We will work with our communities and service providers to define the QUAD principles in terms consistent with the cultural context of our communities, and we will collaborate with communities and Government to ensure that every First Nation child in this province has access to quality, culturally-responsive, universal, inclusive, accessible, affordable and developmental programs and services.

Early learning and child care will have a place on our political agenda. As one of the essential powers of First Nations Governments, early learning and child care will be part of our Treaty negotiations and our self-government arrangements. We will insist on recognition of our authority and jurisdiction for healthy child development and will work with the Government of BC to create a new, more appropriate policy, legislative and regulatory regime.

Along with the Prime Minister, we are committed to “transformative change” through lifelong learning and wellness. We are committed to working with both levels of Government to close the gap between conditions for non-Aboriginal Canadians and First Nations, and between services and needs.

We expect BC to continue to take a lead role in early learning and child care, and we look forward to working with both levels of Government to achieve our mutual goals and objectives for BC First Nations children.

Signed:

Grand Chief Doug Kelly, First Nations Summit Political Executive
Grand Chief Edward John, First Nations Summit Political Executive
Dave Porter, First Nations Summit Political Executive

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in the treaty negotiation process in British Columbia. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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