

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

January 11, 2022

FNLCOptimistic that Agreements-in-Principle First Real Step in Reforming Discriminatory First Nations Child and Family Services System

(Xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwḵwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) After more than thirty years of advocacy and litigation, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLCO) welcomed last week’s announcement that there has been an Agreement in Principle reached to reform Canada’s First Nations child and family services program, and to compensate the children and families who have been unjustly impacted by this discriminatory program.

On December 31st, 2021, it was announced that two Agreements-in-Principle (AIPs) had been reached, with a further announcement on January 4th, 2022 outlining the general terms of this nearly \$40 billion agreement – the largest settlement agreement in Canada’s history – with \$20 billion committed to compensating victims and another \$19.8 billion for long-term reforms of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program.

“We are cautiously hopeful that, with these AIPs, we will finally see the long-awaited and necessary changes to the genocidal and racist child welfare system that has imposed generations of trauma upon our First Nations children, families and communities,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. “We want to acknowledge the tireless work and advocacy of the First Nations Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations, as well as all of the other parties to this decades long litigation. We also want to acknowledge all of the leaders and those who have been on the front lines fighting for and supporting First Nations kids and families all of these years, and who continue to do so each and every day. As the First Nations Leadership Council, we will be closely monitoring and working with the parties and First Nations in BC in the coming months to ensure the final agreements are responsive to and reflective of the needs of First Nations in this region. While we acknowledge this is a substantial commitment, this is early in the discussions and the final agreement for long-term reform must ensure First Nations are provided with adequate, stable and sustainable resources to address the key drivers of child welfare involvement such as poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, and access to health care.”

Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Task Group continued: “This is an historic settlement agreement. However, the time taken to come to this place has been at the cost of years of trauma for First Nations children and families – some of whom did not live to witness this turning point, and many of whom are still bearing the pain and trauma of discrimination, forcible removals and denied medical supports. There is no amount of money that can undo that harm. And, as we know from past experiences, these large payments can often perpetuate that trauma in unintentional ways. As negotiations towards a final agreement are underway it will be critical that First Nations, and the individuals and families directly impacted, are well supported and that their voices are at the table. As we move forward, they are the ones who must be at the center of the dialogue and we will stand with them through this process.”

“As we have continuously stated, First Nations have never given up our inherent right to care for and protect our children. This right was forcibly oppressed for many First Nation parents and grandparents through the imposition of colonial and genocidal laws and practices – first through the Indian residential school system, then the 60’s



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Scoop, and now, through what we have termed the 'Millennium Scoop'. Through these AIPs, there is explicit affirmation that the *status quo* has not and will never be good enough to meet the needs of our children, families and communities. Now is the time for concrete, meaningful and real changes to the way that First Nations child and family services are understood, delivered, and resourced—grounded in the values, worldviews and inherent rights of First Nations peoples, and our minimum human right standards as outlined and affirmed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*,” stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “This discrimination and ongoing harm to our children ends now, and we will accept nothing less as these final agreements are negotiated. Canada must uphold their commitments to First Nations in ending this discrimination by properly resourcing First Nations as we stand up our jurisdiction over child and family wellbeing.”

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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