



FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

**Indigenous Child and Family Services Directors
Our Children Our Way Society**

News Release

November 20, 2023

FNLC and Our Children Our Way Society acknowledge National Child Day – a day to celebrate and uphold the rights of all children!

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) – On November 20th, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) and the Indigenous Child & Family Services Directors Our Children Our Way Society (OCOW) acknowledge *National Child Day – a day to celebrate and uphold the rights of all children!* National Child Day is celebrated annually on November 20th, marking the anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Canada signed onto this Convention in 1991. On this same day, we also stand with UNICEF to acknowledge and celebrate World Children’s Day – an annual day of action for children, by children.

Children First Canada is upholding #EveryChildEveryRight as the 2023 theme for National Child Day. In their commitment to reconciliation, Children First Canada is recognizing the unique rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children – honouring the past, acknowledging the present, and igniting hope for the future.

Unfortunately, Indigenous children in British Columbia continue to experience multifaceted discrimination within the child welfare system. Earlier this year, the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), the First Nations Summit (FNS) and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), called upon the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia to immediately cease discriminating against Indigenous children and families receiving provincially funded child and family services, to ensure discrimination never occurs again, and to compensate the children and families who have endured discrimination. The Chiefs also designated November 20th as a Day of Action to end discrimination against First Nations children, including British Columbia’s ongoing discrimination in the funding of off-reserve child and family services.

On November 20th, the FNLC and OCOW collectively raise our hands to the many heroes across Turtle Island who have fought tirelessly on behalf of children, and in particular, to those heroes who have fought for the same rights to be afforded to Indigenous children.

“On National Child Day, it is important to reflect and recognize that there is nothing more important than our Children, our future generations! It is imperative that we continue to work collectively to overhaul outdated and colonial laws and policies relating to First Nations child welfare, which for too long have devastated our cultures and our family life”, said Cheryl Casimer of the FNS Political Executive. “It is unacceptable that our children continue to disproportionately suffer and die within the existing broken child welfare system. Since time immemorial, First Nations traditionally exercised systems of care to ensure the safety and well-being of our children. We must work together to go back to using these valuable practices to protect and uphold the rights of our children.”

“It is critical to have our First Nations Leadership stand with us in the monumental work ahead as we strive to care for Indigenous children in the way they deserve, while upholding their inherent and modern-day rights,” says Mary Teegee, OCOW Chair. “We are honoured to have the BCAFN, the UBCIC and the FNS endorse the work of the OCOW as a source of expertise and for their commitment to working collaboratively with OCOW on behalf of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities”.

“First Nations kids deserve to have the same financial supports whether they are on or off reserve. Today, on National Child Day, we are calling on the government to immediately release a financial report of funding provided for First Nations child and family services on reserve and off reserve, upholding confidentiality. This is a bare minimum- once equity is achieved a needs assessment must be done and then funding revisited again, said Chief Don Tom, Vice President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs”.

“First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and families have always held our children as sacred. Our people knew that these beautiful gifts were our most precious resource,” says Kelley McReynolds, Executive Director of Ayas Menmen Child & Family Services. “The imposition of colonial and barbaric systems on our family and community systems has been catastrophic to our communities and their ability to care for and hold sacred our young ones. In 2023, our people are healing, our children are at the center of all that we do, and we will continue to ensure their rights are upheld and that the historic wrongs of the past will never be repeated.”

”On this special day, we celebrate First Nations children and recognize the profound interconnectedness of all generations and families. It is our sacred responsibility to safeguard the well-being and development of our youth. To this end, we must eradicate all forms of discrimination against them to ensure they realize their boundless potential” concluded Regional Chief Terry Teegee from the CB Assembly of First Nations.

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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).

The Our Children Our Way Society’s (OCOW) mission is to support Indigenous Nations’ visions for jurisdiction and self-government pertaining to the well-being of their children and youth. The OCOW aims to speak with a collective and expert voice on child welfare matters, with a focus on systemic changes to policy, practice, legislation and funding to ensure the best interests of Indigenous children are being met. In a nutshell: our children, our way.

For further information, contact:

Chief Don Tom, Vice-President, UBCIC Phone:	(250) 813-3315
Cheryl Casimer, FNS Political Executive, Phone:	(778) 875-2157
Annette Schroeter, Communications Officer, BCAFN, Phone:	(778) 281-1655
Mary Teegee, Chair, Our Children Our Way Society, Phone:	(250) 612-8710
Kelley McReynolds, Ayas Menmen Child & Family Services:	(604) 985-4111