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## ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS 2011 FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

*Canada has a pressing opportunity to move forward in partnership with First Nations. Now during the federal election campaign of 2011, we invite all Canadians to learn more about First Nations and the potential we have to support one another.*

*There are specific steps that can and should be taken immediately to ensure fairness and equal opportunity. We encourage all federal parties to consider the facts and make a commitment to walk with First Nations on the path to reconciliation, to uphold our enduring relationships established through Treaty and in agreements and to support the capacity of our governments and citizens to advance our self-sufficiency.*



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## Assembly of First Nations A Vision Forward Federal Election Priorities 2011

First Nations have a unique relationship with the federal government, on a nation-to-nation basis grounded in our rights and Treaties. A federal election provides the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) with an opportunity to bring forward the collective concerns of First Nations for federal political parties to act upon.

First Nations across Canada are moving forward and breaking down barriers based on a clear set of priorities. This is our agenda, one that has profound impacts on the productivity and quality of life for all of Canada. It is the responsibility of all Canadians, particularly elected representatives, to work with us, and this election provides a tremendous opportunity to go forward together, improve the quality of life of First Nation peoples and Canadians.

The priorities expressed by First Nations are numerous, reflective of the diverse and varied situations, geography and history experienced by our Nations. Based on resolutions from Chiefs-in-Assembly and strategic planning of the AFN National Executive, we have narrowed in on specific national priorities for an upcoming election all reflecting our broad theme of **'working together now to build success for the future.'** Priorities are organized under the following four headings:

- A. **Affirmation** – Recognizing rights and responsibilities and enabling First Nation governments to move beyond the *Indian Act*, implementing Treaties and agreements and settling claims.
- B. **Education** – Investing and enabling a sustainable, equitable First Nation education system supportive of First Nation language and culture.
- C. **Partnership** – Unlocking the economic potential of First Nations, supporting First Nation economies, new energy opportunities and affirming environmental responsibility.
- D. **Safety and Community Health** – Addressing critical foundations of community health and safety including housing, safe drinking water, emergency response, community justice and intervention to affirm and protect the vital role of women and children in our communities.





## A. AFFIRMATION

### Enabling First Nation governments, implementing Treaties and agreements and settling claims

First Nations across Canada are moving forward on plans and ideas to build strong and sustainable First Nation governments, which are no longer constrained and controlled by the *Indian Act*.

To successfully move forward, fundamental changes are required in the relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nation governments. Canada's role is to support the innovation being driven by First Nations and remove barriers to success and discontinue its interference in First Nations' jurisdiction. Canada also has a role in supporting First Nations through change, by working with them on appropriate transition mechanisms, capacity tools and training where requested.

Treaties affect all parts of Canada, and while significant differences exist, all of these Treaties have at least one thing in common: they are the basis of the First Nation - Crown relationship, not the *Indian Act*.

On November 12, 2010 the Government of Canada endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which sets out minimum standards to guide both Canada and First Nations towards a relationship of partnership and mutual respect as set out in the Treaties.

An important step in putting the UNDRIP into practice is to change the accountability relationship between the Government of Canada, First Nation governments and organizations, and the citizens they all represent.

#### A government supportive to First Nations would:

- Commit to work with and **support First Nation government innovation** and progress thereby eliminating the constraints of the *Indian Act*.
- Work with First Nation governments to determine a **stable and predictable approach to funding transfers**, based on equitable escalators and mutually established service standards.
- Ensure policy development and legislation **complies with the standards established by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** and is consistent with s.35 of the *Constitution Act, 1985*.
- **Restructure the machinery of government** to focus on the application of the UNDRIP and s. 35 in all dealings with First Nations – and to move away from the current approach of monitoring how First Nation governments administer federal programs.





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- **Reinvest savings** from restructuring in transfers to First Nation governments.
- Create the **Office of First Nations Accountability** to be led by an independent **ombudsperson** responsible for overseeing accountability between Canada and First Nations, and providing guidelines, training, tools and resources to First Nation governments and citizens.
- Support the creation of an **Impartial and Independent Treaty Tribunal** to resolve conflicts that arise in the implementation of Treaties.
- Immediately take steps to **reform the current Comprehensive Claims Policy**, and work cooperatively with First Nations to develop a fair and honest policy and process for addressing Aboriginal Title and Rights, consistent with the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*, the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the UNDRIP and Canadian jurisprudence.

## B. EDUCATION

### Investing and enabling a sustainable, equitable First Nation education system

First Nations have a clear and grounded belief in First Nations control of First Nations education – a movement which started in 1972. Since this time we have witnessed improvements and successes. However, change has not occurred fast enough and Canada cannot afford to lose another generation of children. We must not lose a single child to our past of oppression and inequality in education.

Investing in First Nations is not only a benefit to First Nation communities, it's a long-term and sustainable stimulus plan for Canada's economy.

#### Consider the Facts:

- It is predicted that Canada will face a labour shortage by 2017 as baby boomers retire and there are fewer workers to replace them. With more than half of First Nations people under the age of 23, our youth can fill this gap, but only if they are empowered with the skills and education to meet the need.
- At the current rate, it will take 63 years for the income gap between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canada to disappear. However, with an increase in educational outcomes, First Nations workers would add \$179 billion to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2026 through employment and by reducing government expenditures on income support, social services, health care, and security.
- Only half of First Nation youth complete high school *but when* First Nations youth complete high school, they are twice as likely to be employed.





- Only 8% of Aboriginal people have a university degree, compared to 23% of the Canadian population, *but when* First Nations youth are able to complete a university degree, they triple their earning potential.

**A government supportive to First Nations would invest in the potential of our children, through:**

- Clearly committing to **First Nations control of First Nations education**.
- Immediately ensuring that **all of our communities have an adequate school** and every First Nation child has a safe and secure place to learn.
- Immediately address the existing funding crisis in First Nations education by **eliminating funding disparity and delivering a sustainable education guarantee** based on real costs and indexation.
- Investing in the **learning services required for any 21st century school**, including gymnasiums, libraries, vocational education and computers and science labs.
- Working with First Nations to develop professional **institutional supports** to deliver second- and third-level educational supports including **First Nation curriculum** and **immersion in First Nation languages**.
- Commit to providing a statutory guarantee to fund the actual costs of First Nation students attending **post-secondary education**.
- Recognize, champion and support **Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning**.

## C. PARTNERSHIPS

### Economies, Energy and the Environment

First Nations have long conveyed that they are not opposed to development - when it is approached in an environmentally responsible way and respectful of rights. In fact, First Nations are moving forward to advance opportunities unlocking the economic potential and creating sustainable jobs and livelihoods for their communities.

#### Consider the facts:

- Natural Resources Canada cites that, in 2008 alone, the (natural resource) sectors generated 12%, or \$147.5 billion, of Canada's GDP and directly employed close to 859,000 people.





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- The vast majority of natural resource projects directly impact First Nations territories, rights and resources. Settlement of First Nation claims, resource revenue sharing and fair partnerships are essential to progress in this critical sector of the Canadian economy.
- The numbers of First Nations communities looking at clean energy opportunities as a means to spark economic interest is growing.
- Investments in the economy matter, as does the capacity and readiness to respond to economic opportunity. As such, AFN is hosting the International Indigenous Summit on Energy and Mining in Niagara Falls, Ontario, June 27-29, 2011.

#### A government supportive to First Nations would:

- Work with First Nations to develop long-term, forward-building strategies that help secure economic capacities of First Nations to respond to development opportunity, such as:
  - Enhanced First Nation labour force and skills development
  - Connectivity and e-community strategies
  - Enhanced economic tools that increase fiscal growth and local/regional economic support services, programs, and incentives
  - Systems that support environment sustainability such as through First Nation economic programs, services and incentives
- Work with First Nations to help:
  - Build greater focus on unlocking First Nation economic potential and building positive relationships
  - Better enable First Nation interests of stewardship, balance, environment and sustainability
  - Build common resource networks and facilitation functions to participate in energy, mining and other sectors in a manner that is appropriate to First Nations
- Work with First Nations to support and encourage decisions that protect the environment:
  - To affirm and advance First Nation rights in ways that improve the quality of life and strengthen First Nation citizens, communities and governments
  - Immediately establish a process that involves First Nations in federal regulatory systems overseeing major projects, such as that with **Schedule 2** of the Mining Regulations under the *Fisheries Act*.
  - Engage in meaningful consultations on environmental policy, programs and initiatives





## D. SAFETY

### Supporting Safe, Secure and Healthy Communities

The sad reality is that too many First Nations people do not feel safe and secure in their homes and communities. This is not only about violence or crime, but people who do not feel secure drinking the water that comes out of their tap. People who do not feel safe in their own homes because of rampant mold, or the risk of fire in communities with antiquated or nonexistent emergency response systems. Families who live in fear of someone getting sick because of limited access to medical services and the prospect of having a family member taken far from home. People who do not feel secure as they cannot access reliable food sources due to their remoteness. People who do not feel secure in urban centers where they do not have access to safe housing or appropriate housing.

First Nations are embarking on a path of positive change and re-building our Nations, but this change is hampered by a lack of security for individuals, families and communities.

#### Consider the facts:

- Approximately 44% of the existing housing stock in First Nation communities needs major repair and another 15% requires outright replacement. An estimated 85,000 new units are required to alleviate overcrowding and backlogs.
- Current numbers show that 49 communities have high-risk water facilities and 114 communities are under drinking water advisories including four “do not consume” advisories.
- According to the Correctional Investigator, “while the federal inmate population in Canada actually went down 12.5% between 1996 and 2004, the number of First Nations people in federal institutions increased by 21.7%, resulting in a 34% difference in incarceration rates.”
- Between 1996 and 2004, the number of federally incarcerated First Nations women increased 74.2%. The annual cost of incarcerating one female First Nations offender (\$348,810) is equivalent to funding more than five students to complete a three-year university program.
- Aboriginal youth are eight times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and 90% of teen, urban sex-trade workers in Canada are Aboriginal girls under 18 years of age.
- Injury is the leading cause of death for Aboriginal children, youth, and young adults. The injury death rate among Aboriginal teens is almost four times that of Canadians overall.





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- First Nations youth are five to seven times more likely to die of suicide than their peers in the overall population.
- Severe health outcomes for First Nations continue to exist. 21% of First Nations adults live with diabetes. Our communities have 33 times more tuberculosis cases than the general Canadian population. More than 70% of First Nations peoples do not have a healthy weight. Our infant mortality rate is twice as high and our people continue to smoke at rates far higher than Canadian averages – at almost 60% for occasional smokers.

#### A government supportive to First Nations would:

- Work with First Nations to address root causes and impacts affecting healthy communities by developing and supporting a **First Nations Health Plan**. This Plan would close the gaps in health outcomes and commit to sustainable funding of First Nations health services reflective of real costs including Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB).
- Work with First Nation governments to establish a National Action Plan to **end violence against First Nations women**.
- Establish a **First Nations Access to Justice Fund** that supports our people accessing legal supports and the court system.
- Immediately take steps to **strengthen First Nations networks of emergency services** – fire, medical response, policing – and ensure coordinated multi-jurisdictional plans are in place across the country through stable multi-year agreements.
- Immediately negotiate **firm agreements and protocols with all Provinces and Territories to ensure that “Jordan’s Principle” is upheld** – meaning that First Nations children will not face delays or disruptions in essential health services while governments argue over who will pay the bill.
- **Fund the construction of all-weather roads** to First Nations to ensure all communities have year-round access to supplies, services and emergency support.
- **Fund transition services in urban centres**, such as Friendship Centres, that support First Nations citizens and protect against criminal involvement.
- Invest in the infrastructure and systems needed for sustainable and universal access to **clean water** in First Nations.
- Work with First Nations to develop a **Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy** that supports greater community security and lower incarceration rates.
- Support the development of a **sustainable housing strategy** with guaranteed investments in housing for First Nations communities, and targeted supports for the development of housing in urban areas accessible to First Nations.
- Support sustainable, long-term investment in uninsured health benefits.

