

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



Communiqué from National Chief Shawn Atleo

DECEMBER 2012

*The Assembly of First Nations issues regular updates work underway at the national office.
More information can be found at www.afn.ca.*

AFN Special Chiefs Assembly – December 4-6, 2012 – Gatineau, Quebec

On behalf of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) national executive, I offer thanks to all those who participated in the Special Chiefs Assembly in Gatineau, Quebec December 4-6, 2012. A total of almost 1,000 First Nation leaders, technicians, community members and observers joined for the important Assembly of dialogue and decision-making.

We gathered under the theme “The Unfulfilled Promise of Section 35” with the intent to reaffirm a direction forward, to harness the energy of our peoples, to seize this moment as the time for change, and to act now for our peoples based on our clear rights and responsibilities. We did just this. In a unanimous statement of unity, Chiefs in Assembly agreed to stand together to defend our lands, territories, peoples and jurisdiction, to protect the integrity of Treaty and inherent rights, and to ensure economic stability and protection of the environment. This declaration further states that Chiefs in Assembly fully support the participation of all First Nation peoples in decision-making process that impact inherent and treaty rights and stand united to reject assimilation and termination policies, processes or legislation imposed by other governments. (See below for full text of statement).

A delegation of Chiefs, First Nation citizens and other supporters gathered on the Hill in a spontaneous demonstration of this resolve and unity on the first day of the Assembly. I was honoured to stand among Chiefs, Grand Chiefs and members of the national executive, expressing clearly the need for promises to be fulfilled and rights be respected and implemented. Our message was, and is clear. We will not back down. We will not rest until Treaty, title and rights are fully implemented in ways that respect the original intent, and the promises, agreements and commitments since, and we achieve the change required for our peoples.

Together, Chiefs in Assembly passed a total of 48 resolutions on a number of priority areas for action, including, but not limited to, the assertion of inherent and treaty rights to lands, traditional territories and resources, opposition to federal government funding cuts to representative organizations, Tribal Councils and First Nations, environment and fisheries, direct action on missing and murdered women, mental wellness, fiscal arrangements and equalization, policing and education.

Where to Next: Beyond the Indian Act, Fulfilling the Promise of Section 35

Furthering the grassroots efforts of March 4 Justice, AFN hosted a special panel discussion on moving beyond the Indian Act, together with Carleton University’s Centre for Aboriginal Culture and Education, and the School of Canadian Studies on December 3, 2012. Panellists included former National Chief Ovide Mercredi, AFN BC Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould, March 4 Justice’s Leo Baskatawang, National Association of Friendship Centres President Vera Pawis Tabobondung and Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Councillor Caitlin Tolley who shared their thoughts and opinions on strengthening First Nation governments and implementing constitutionally protected rights, title and Treaties. More than 100

people gathered for the discussion, posing thoughtful questions and sparking good dialogue. The event will be aired on CPAC Saturday, December 8, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. ET.

Chiefs Committee on Education - Update

On November 28th, the Chiefs Committee on Education issued a letter to Minister Duncan setting out the clear position of First Nation control of First Nation education and the need to achieve understanding on the pressing priority of First Nation education. As indicated during the SCA Education session, Minister Duncan had indicated a willingness to meet, which given both House of Commons business and the SCA business was then only confirmed late in the day Thursday, December 6, 2012. AFN Regional Chief Morley Googoo led a small delegation along with other members of CCOE and requested my support to attend a meeting with the Minister. This brief meeting provided an opportunity for the Chiefs Committee to re-affirm the concerns and positions of the leadership and First Nations, to reiterate the necessity of respect and implementation for Treaty and inherent rights and for fair, sustainable funding and the fulfillment of Canada's duty to fully consult with First Nations.

We maintain Canada must attain the free, prior and informed consent of all First Nations. This is why it is critical to be clear that contrary to some early media reports, there is absolutely no deal between AFN and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). First Nations must and will lead the way forward. The Minister has offered to meet with the Chiefs Committee on Education in January 2013.

With the leadership of the Chiefs Committee on Education, clearly affirmed by resolution, the work to advocate for First Nations education continues with a press for fair, stable and predictable funding for First Nation education and schools, inclusive of First Nation languages and cultures and consistent with First Nation rights and the Treaty relationship. It is very clear that every First Nation, every Treaty and every region must set their own path forward and it is the role of AFN to support and advocate for this full diversity with respect to every First Nation approach. Our resolve to achieve positive change for our children is stronger than ever.

First Nations across the country have demonstrated tremendous leadership, driving the importance of rights implementation and education as a key to unlocking the full potential of our peoples. First Nations must lead the way forward and there must be respect for the unique, diverse approaches across the regions and country. Only through respectful dialogue, will we achieve change for our kids.

Ending Violence Against Women

Chiefs in Assembly acknowledged the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, also known as White Ribbon Day, by continuing advance plans to seek justice and end violence against Indigenous women.

Planning for a national forum and strategizing on action and advocacy efforts aimed at ending violence against Indigenous women was the focus of just one of this week's many strategy sessions for Chiefs and Assembly delegates. Native Women's Association of Canada President Michele Audette, along with AFN National Women's Council Member Adeline Webber and families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women participated in thoughtful discussion and dialogue to support existing and new advocacy efforts for a National Commission of Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal women.

On December 4th, Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas from Tobique First Nation in New Brunswick proposed an inquiry in the upper chamber on the "status, impact and effectiveness of the government's response to date" in regard to the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. While this is an important and welcomed message from the Senate, we will continue to press for an independent National Public Commission of Inquiry that will address root causes of violence and vulnerability and focus on action, awareness and prevention.

The call for an independent National Public Commission of Inquiry has been strongly made by First Nation leadership over many years, and was reiterated in July at the AFN Annual General Assembly in Toronto where Chiefs in Assembly reinforced the need for such an Inquiry to include hearings, a review of police policies and procedures in regard to searches, investigations and communication between police, officials and families, and the examination of the socio-cultural and socio-economic risk factors associated with Indigenous women and girls.

With help from CUPE National, AFN launched a postcard and social media campaign in October encouraging Indigenous peoples and all Canadians to support calls for National Public Commission of Inquiry and make a personal declaration to live without violence. For more information, visit <http://www.afn.ca/index.php/en/policy-areas/i-pledge.-end-violence>.

Statement of Unity: In Honour of our Peoples and Our Land

The following statement was adopted unanimously by Chiefs in Assembly December 6, 2012.

We, the original peoples of Turtle Island hereby assert our sovereignty as Nations, entrusted to us by the Creator,

As First Nations peoples, we are guided by principles of peace, harmony and respect; we are also bestowed with the responsibility by the Creator to defend our territories, including traditional and Treaty lands,

We have maintained these principles despite the imposition of illegal government legislation and policies against our citizens,

In solidarity, we categorically reject the assimilation and termination policies used by the government of Canada against our nations and our citizens and,

We support the participation of all First Nations peoples in decision-making processes that impact our inherent and treaty rights,

We unconditionally reject any Canadian or provincial legislation, policies, or processes that impact our lands, air, waters and resources which have not obtained our free, prior, and informed consent,

In order to ensure economic stability and protection of our environment, development projects or any other initiatives that may impact our Nations requires our full and inclusive participation and our free, prior and informed consent,

To protect the integrity of our treaty and inherent rights, we hereby put the Government of Canada on notice that any further imposition of legislation and/or policies will be met with appropriate measures, We formally call upon our citizens – our men, youth, women, elders, warriors and all other allies – to unify and support one another during this time of attacks on our governments and nations,

The First Nation Chiefs in Assembly, from this day forward, declare unity and resolve to forcefully defend our lands, territories, peoples and jurisdiction.

Again, I thank all those who took time away from their families and communities to join us for the Special Chiefs Assembly. It is this participation that is essential in driving the work forward – this work, the important and difficult work to achieve change for this generation and the next. I wish everyone all the best over the holiday season. Please enjoy time with family and friends.

Kleco, Kleco!