

# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL CHIEF'S NEWSLETTER

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**ASSEMBLY OF FIRST  
NATIONS/ASSEMBLEE DES  
PREMIERES NATIONS**



**@AFN\_UPDATE  
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## SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY SHOWCASES OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW RELATIONSHIP

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The Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly held in December 2015 welcomed hundreds of delegates to Algonquin territory in Gatineau, Quebec. The holiday season was not the only reason for the positivity among delegates. Something was in the air, and perhaps it was the freshness of a budding new relationship with the federal government. Cabinet Ministers were in attendance throughout the week. The Prime Minister addressed Chiefs in Indigenous languages. Guest speakers were candid and responsive to Chiefs.



RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson hears directly from Chiefs and delegates at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Gatineau, QC December 9, 2015.

RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson spoke candidly December 9, 2015 in response to concerns about racism in his police service.

Prime Minister Trudeau's message to Chiefs-in-Assembly on December 8, 2015 was received by standing ovation. This was the first time a Prime Minister addressed Chiefs in this way - with a message grounded in the need for a complete renewal of the nation-to-nation relationship, and to move forward collaboratively in the spirit of reconciliation. National Chief Perry Bellegarde presented the Prime Minister with a star blanket.



National Chief Bellegarde honours Prime Minister Justin Trudeau with starblanket during the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Gatineau, Quebec December 8, 2015.

Other highlights included a special parliamentary reception on December 8, 2015 where Indigenous Members of Parliament were honoured and international Ambassadors acknowledged.

## IMPORTANT COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AFN SEES AGREEMENT AS A FLOOR RATHER THAN A CEILING

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National Chief Bellegarde with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Environment Minister Catherine McKenna and Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris, France November 28 2015.

On November 27, 2015, National Chief Bellegarde traveled to Paris and participated in COP 21 as part of Canada's official delegation and was one of Canada's representatives at the opening plenary. National Chief Bellegarde delivered a clear message that the rights of Indigenous peoples must be recognized at this conference. A final agreement was announced on December 12, 2015.

The agreement sets the goal of limiting average global temperature rise to 2° C, with an additional aspirational target of getting to 1.5° C; a five-year review cycle starting in 2018 to evaluate and strengthen national action plans towards the goal of zero emissions; financing to help developing and vulnerable nations to deal with the impacts of climate change; and linking climate adaptation goals to mitigation.

In a statement, National Chief Bellegarde commented on the new agreement : "Indigenous peoples are the first to feel the effects of climate change and we must be involved in developing

and implementing the necessary actions to address this urgent issue in a way that respects our rights. This global commitment to action is positive, but the agreement indicates the parties may be trying to detract from their existing human rights obligations. First Nations will not allow that to happen. These rights are not optional in fighting climate change. First Nations and Canada together will lead by example and demonstrate that implementing the rights of Indigenous peoples is the best way to address climate change."

AFN NWT Regional Chief Bill Erasmus was at COP 21 for most of the discussions, along with AFN officials. On February 10, 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau announced that he and the Premiers will meet with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis leaders on March 2, 2016. The meeting is part of the follow up to the commitments made on climate change last year in Paris.

## WORKING TO ENSURE ADEQUATE INVESTMENTS FOR FIRST NATIONS

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National Chief Bellegarde and members of AFN Executive Committee meet with federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau on First Nations priorities for the 2016 federal budget.

National Chief Bellegarde and members of the AFN Executive met with federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau January 28, 2016. At a critical time prior to the release of the next federal budget, National Chief Bellegarde shared AFN's plan for closing the gap in the quality of life between First Nations people and Canada. The practical, comprehensive approach highlights the benefits of investing in First Nations as the youngest and fastest growing population in the country. The plan includes the federal government lifting the 2% cap and acting on clear demonstrations of funding shortfalls for First Nations across the board, including the recent decision by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on child welfare.

In a statement following the meeting, National Chief Bellegarde said: "We set out immediate requirements for the upcoming budget and longer term recommendations for investments and change. This is about safe and secure communities for our people, strong First Nations governments and economies, and action on First Nations rights to build a stronger country for all of us. We had a constructive discussion and the Finance Minister welcomed our recommendations. We will keep pushing for the necessary investments and fair fiscal transfers for First Nations. We will keep pushing for an ongoing process to work towards a proper and improved fiscal relationship with the Crown."

***"FIRST NATIONS RIGHTS TO BUILD A STRONGER COUNTRY FOR ALL OF US."***

## COMING TOGETHER, A COMMUNITY HEALING

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National Chief Bellegarde participates in a community ceremony in La Loche January 24, 2016.

Thoughts and prayers showered the community of La Loche following the tragic fatal shootings January 22, 2016.

National Chief Bellegarde took part in a community ceremony January 24 along with Prime Minister Trudeau, federal Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale, Health Minister Jane Philpott, former La Loche Mayor and now NDP MP Georgina Jolibois, Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Chief Bobby Cameron, and acting La Loche Mayor Kevin Janvier.

In a statement released January 22, National Chief Bellegarde shared his condolences and thoughts on next steps:

***"RIGHT NOW, OUR ATTENTION AND OUR EFFORTS ARE FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING THE CITIZENS OF LA LOCHE AND THE CLEARWATER RIVER DENE NATION"***

"These kinds of specific incidents are rare in our communities. We want to ensure the investigation is thorough, that we focus on relief for the community and, going forward, that we can better understand steps we can take toward prevention. We need a unified effort by all sectors of the public and all levels of government to immediately ensure the necessary resources and supports are present to ensure safety for First Nations people. We must all work together to identify the needs, priorities and services required to prevent violence in our communities. First Nations leadership is committed to working with all governments, at all levels, to take action to prevent such senseless violence and to ensure safety and security for everyone in Canada and especially the safety and security of our children and young people. Right now, our attention and our efforts are focused on supporting the citizens of La Loche and the Clearwater River Dene Nation as they deal with the aftermath of this terrible tragedy. We stand with them, support them and will do whatever they ask to assist them during this difficult time. I respectfully ask all First Nations people to send prayers and engage in ceremony for those who are grieving and working to heal today."



National Chief Bellegarde with First Nations Child and Family Caring Society Executive Director Cindy Blackstock, Regional Chiefs Kevin Hart and Isadore Day, FSIN's Kim Jonathan and daughter responding to CHRT decision at the national press theatre in Ottawa January 26, 2016.

After nine years and far too many lost opportunities for First Nations children, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) put the kids first.

In an historic decision released January 26, 2016, the CHRT found the federal government has discriminated against First Nations children and families on reserve since the beginning of residential schools, and directed the government to work with First Nations on a new system of child welfare on reserve. This decision was based on hearings that took place in 2013 and 2014, involving 25 witnesses and more than 500 documents filed as evidence.

National Chief Bellegarde joined Cindy Blackstock from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society for a national press conference in Ottawa welcoming the decision.

“First Nations are ready to work together with the federal government to develop a new system of child and family services as directed by the CHRT, and this includes immediate relief funding for First Nations children and families and a new collaborative approach to a funding formula that is responsive to needs, reflective of regional diversity and respects fundamental human rights,” said National Chief Bellegarde. “We cannot wait any longer to close the gap, and I look forward to seeing how the next federal budget will support safety, fairness and equity for First Nations children and families.”

The AFN and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society jointly filed the complaint to the CHRT in February 2007.

***“FIRST NATIONS ARE READY TO WORK TOGETHER WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP A NEW SYSTEM OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES”***



National Chief Bellegarde honours Prime Minister Justin Trudeau with starblanket during the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Gatineau, Quebec December 8, 2015.

More than 800 people, including those working in the industry, political representatives, analysts and observers from First Nations and non-Indigenous backgrounds, attended the First Nations Forum on Energy: Setting Priorities held in Vancouver February 10-11, 2016.

National Chief Bellegarde opened up this important Forum by calling for First Nations involvement in all aspects of decision-making, planning and development related to the energy sector. First Nations must be seen as key players in the energy sector with rights, title and Treaties that must be respected and upheld in any approaches to energy development.

In a Statement, the National Chief set out three over-arching priorities for First Nations in the energy sector : “Our priorities are inclusion, balance and diversity. Inclusion means embracing First Nations’ role in shaping Canada’s energy future, as governments, as business partners and as environmental stewards and experts. Balance means that when we create economic opportunities we do so while carrying out our responsibilities to protect the lands and waters. Diversity means recognizing and respecting the range of opinions and involvement of First Nations in the energy sector. Our inherent right to self-determination means the ability to say yes to a development process, or no to a development project.”

The Honourable Jim Carr, Federal Minister of Natural Resources and the Honourable David Zimmer, Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, addressed the Forum.

***“OUR INHERENT RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION MEANS THE ABILITY TO SAY YES TO A DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, OR NO TO A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.”***

# RACISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED, NATIONAL CHIEF MEETS WITH COMMISSIONER



RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson addresses the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly on December 9, 2016.

RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson spoke candidly at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in December 2015. He said he knows there are racists in his police force and he does not want them there.

As follow up to these comments and as part of ongoing efforts to improve the relationship with the RCMP, National Chief Bellegarde met with Commissioner Paulson in Ottawa January 15, 2016.

The discussion focused on the need for concrete action to end racism within the police force. Specific recommendations for improvements include cultural competency training, community engagement protocols and accurate and reliable data and collection systems and databases.

“Our goal is to ensure First Nations don’t fear the police, and instead reach out to them for protection as it should be,” said National Chief Bellegarde. Particularly in the wake of the TRC report, and this era of reconciliation, we must do all we can to improve relationships across the board.”

Addressing shortfalls in policing and working to achieve adequate and sustainable funding for First Nation police services is part of AFN’s collaborative efforts with provinces and territories, including work toward the upcoming National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women taking place in Winnipeg at the end of February.

***“OUR GOAL IS TO ENSURE FIRST NATIONS DON’T FEAR THE POLICE, AND INSTEAD REACH OUT TO THEM FOR PROTECTION AS IT SHOULD BE”***