

# Honouring Promises

2019 FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES FOR FIRST NATIONS AND CANADA



*Canada was formed with the shared promises of peace, friendship and mutual respect with First Nations in the presence of all of creation. These promises, for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows, are to be in effect for peoples now and for those yet unborn. The challenges now faced by First Nations peoples and by all of humanity with the declining state of our natural world were not meant to be. Think of how enriched Canada and the world can be as Canada fulfills on its original promises of peace and sharing with First Nations peoples.*

—National Chief Perry Bellegarde

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*Keep the promises you made  
... and make promises you keep*

The challenges now faced by First Nations were never meant to be. Our collective agreement to friendship, peaceful co-existence and mutual respect has not been honoured.

In recent years, Canada has ranked between 6th and 12th on the UN Human Development Index while First Nations fall between 63rd and 78th. The federal government's Community Well-Being Index shows that the gap has not changed since 1981.

In 2015, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) outlined First Nations priorities to close this gap. Since then, we have seen concrete action and investments, though we have considerable ground to make up to ensure First Nations and Canadians share an equal quality of life – and to see generational shifts in outcomes.

National Chief Perry Bellegarde is urging all Canadians and federal political parties to open their hearts and minds to understand our shared history and look ahead to where we need to go together. Honouring promises, an essential component in real reconciliation, takes collective effort and action.

It starts with a commitment to our Mother Earth; to our natural world, to the air and the water. For generations we have heard promises. Now we must see action, in partnership with Indigenous knowledge.

We must develop a vision of environmental stewardship that is global and holistic, taking us beyond existing targets and timelines, toward a sustainable future for all generations. This includes our promise for progress and economic priorities that protect Mother Earth. We must mutually share and benefit from these lands.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets out the minimum standards necessary for the dignity, survival and well-being of Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Canada must lead in upholding these standards.

Too often, First Nations people are denied justice and do not receive due process as defendants. Sweeping changes must be made to ensure justice and legal systems address racism and discrimination. Indigenous law must share equal status in Canada's judicial system.

Our promise to the next generation is health, education, and attachment to their families and traditions. First Nations young people should have equal opportunity to excel in math and sciences, history and music, skills and trades; wherever their vision leads them to learn. We must inspire our young people to take pride in the languages and traditions sacred to First Nations.

Together we are making progress on these initiatives through shared decision-making. To date, the Prime Minister, Ministers of the Crown, and leaders of the federal political parties have provided unprecedented access to First Nations leadership at the AFN. Much work lies ahead to keep First Nations at the table designing solutions for our shared future.

We are making progress working in partnership with those who share our vision and respect our rights. We must maintain this momentum. The Assembly of First Nations wants all Canadian voters, regardless of political affiliation, to understand First Nations priorities as Canada's priorities.

Honouring these promises will benefit everyone in Canada.



## *Promise to the Next Seven Generations: Preserving Our Natural World*

Increasing extreme weather events, the one million species facing extinction and the melting of Arctic ice must compel us to heal our natural world now. Climate destruction will be addressed by recognizing Indigenous knowledge consistent with our sacred duties. In 2015, the Assembly of First Nations delegates worked with Canada at COP 21 to embed Indigenous rights in the Paris Agreement.

We must continue to work together.

### **Within the first year, the federal government will work with First Nations to:**

- ❖ Act on climate change as a national priority.
- ❖ Work with First Nations as full partners in the implementation of Canada's climate plan, including decisions on revenues generated from greenhouse gas pollution pricing and the implementation of the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.
- ❖ Support the establishment and maintenance of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas to support Canada's international biodiversity commitments to 2020 and beyond.
- ❖ Affirm and support First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights to develop and implement environmental regulations, impact assessment regimes as well as climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- ❖ Provide support for First Nations-led environmental and regulatory reviews.
- ❖ Ensure direct First Nations participation in federal environmental policy making.

Economic development strategies must be framed and guided by our obligations to Mother Earth. It is time to prioritize economic development activities which contribute to the lowest carbon emissions possible and protect biodiversity.

First Nations knowledge keepers have the traditional Indigenous knowledge systems needed for this challenge.

A coherent federal approach to supporting First Nations economic development and infrastructure is needed. Investments must be comparable to those afforded to the rest of Canada. First Nations peoples, locally, must directly benefit from economic development taking place on our territories.

### **Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Ensure access for all First Nations to high speed internet comparable to the rest of Canada.
- ❖ Enhance business equity funds to support First Nations women and youth as entrepreneurs to address the gap in access to capital.
- ❖ Support increased federal procurement from First Nations businesses.
- ❖ Remove barriers for First Nations enterprises to access capital for business development.
- ❖ Create a First Nations infrastructure bank.
- ❖ Include First Nations leadership in ministerial level meetings.
- ❖ Launch discussions about revenue sharing.
- ❖ Require conditions for development approvals to ensure benefits to First Nations within areas of federal jurisdiction.
- ❖ Support First Nations to fully participate in the development of clean energy and sustainable technologies.
- ❖ Support and subsidize First Nations engaged in renewable resource development, including sustainable wildlife harvesting, fishing, forestry and ecosystem services throughout our territories

### **Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Launch a discussion on green sustainable development.
- ❖ Support First Nations to conduct assessments of sustainable economic business development plans which serve to create jobs and economic opportunity while advancing environmental sustainability.

### **In keeping with the long term objectives of First Nations, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Address physical infrastructure needs where electricity, water, telecommunications and roads are concerned such that First Nations peoples benefit in the same way as industry.
- ❖ Negotiate trilateral revenue sharing agreements with First Nations and provinces and territories.

50% of all First Nations children in Canada live in poverty.

53% of First Nations peoples on reserve experience difficulty finding employment.

48% of First Nations peoples on reserve experience low income.



## *Promise to Our Peoples: Infrastructure*

First Nations must be places where our families and, in particular, our young people thrive and remain a priority. First Nations have experienced the impacts of widespread development but not necessarily the benefits.

Given the severe infrastructure deficit in First Nations and the need to mitigate the effects of climate change, major investments are needed, including low-carbon technology and renewable energy sources.

### **Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Support *First Nations Asset Management Planning Approach and Operations and Maintenance* policy reform coupled with a substantial initial financial investment.
- ❖ Create a *Remote Indigenous Community Access Plan* to construct all-season roads to remote First Nations with a substantial initial financial investment.

### **Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Fund vital First Nations community infrastructure including roads and drainage, sanitation, bridges, firehalls and equipment, community buildings, energy systems, structural mitigation for climate change impacts, connectivity and fire protection with a substantial initial financial investment.

### **In keeping with First Nations long term objectives, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Ensure that First Nations have equal access to 'Quality of Life Infrastructure' providing deep supports in education, healthcare, water and sanitation, electricity, connectivity (telecommunications), transport (roads), and disaster prevention and mitigation, including major investments in low-carbon technology and renewable energy sources.

Enjoying quality of life means beginning with clean, fresh and accessible sources of water. Many First Nations continue to live with the negative health outcomes of life under boil water advisories.

First Nations are engaged in work related to sustainable water management, innovative technologies and training, climate change adaptation, and approaches to care and control of water and wastewater.

**Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Repeal the *Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act* and replace it with legislation developed with First Nations that ensures all First Nations have access to safe drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.
- ❖ Commit to a national First Nations infrastructure modernization strategy, beginning with a national First Nations infrastructure assessment developed with First Nations.

**Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Fully fund and resource the implementation of new legislation that includes the creation of a First Nations Water Commission and expands the funding allocations for First Nations in need of upgraded water and wastewater systems.

**In keeping with First Nations long term objectives, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Fund a national First Nations infrastructure modernization strategy to be completed over ten years with a focus on building sustainable, renewable and resilient critical infrastructure for First Nations.

73% of First Nations children on reserve drink from water systems that are designated at high risks of contamination.

The housing crisis for First Nations is a serious obstacle to overall well-being. The scope of overcrowding, and the number of homes in dire need of repair, means living conditions which contribute to poor health outcomes for too many First Nations families. It negatively impacts many socio-economic outcomes from education to safety and security. It is also a factor in the extreme poverty that is a key driver in the over-apprehension of our children by child welfare systems.

**Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Ensure federal financing is available to meet First Nations housing needs.
- ❖ Work with First Nations organizations to transfer control of housing to First Nations.

**Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Fully implement and fund the National First Nations Housing and Related Infrastructure Strategy.

**In keeping with the long term objectives of First Nations, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Ensure financing, based on need, to build high quality sustainable housing for First Nations on reserve as well as in urban and rural locales.

27% of First Nations on reserve live in crowded dwellings.

45% of First Nations dwellings are in need of major repairs.

1 in 15 Indigenous people in urban centers will experience homelessness, compared to 1 in 128 for the general population.

We must improve health for First Nations. This must be done by drawing on First Nations traditional health and healing practices. In keeping with the UN Declaration, Canada must work diligently to ensure First Nations enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

**Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Work with First Nations, early and throughout the budget cycle, to identify ten-year projections for new federal investments in First Nations health.
- ❖ Substantially increase investments for ongoing prevention, critical and chronic care, health systems transformation and mental wellness.
- ❖ Develop and implement a National Substance Misuse Strategy addressing the opioid and methamphetamine crises.

**Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Commit to substantive, long-term and flexible funding that supports a holistic approach to health and wellbeing; and encourages a 'Health In All Policies' approach which addresses the social determinants of First Nations health.

**In keeping with the long term objectives of First Nations, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Support First Nations control of the development and delivery of First Nations health and well-being services.

Tuberculosis rates among First Nation peoples living on-reserve are 40 times the national average.

Suicide rates among First Nation youth are five to seven times higher than other young non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

First Nations men and women on reserve can expect to live 70.0 and 75.4 years respectively, whereas non-Indigenous men and women have life expectancies of 82.0 years and 87.9 years.



## *Promise to Young People: Education*

We must have a Canada where First Nations young people excel in math and science, history and music, skills and trades; wherever their vision leads them to learn. We must deliver all that our ancestors taught us, safely into the hands of our young people. And we must inspire our young people to take pride in the languages and traditions sacred to First Nations.

### **Within the first two years the federal government will:**

- ❖ Commit to substantial investments for First Nations Post-Secondary students, and fully fund them based on need.
  - It is estimated that an additional 78,000 First Nations graduates are needed to close the post-secondary education gap in post-secondary educational attainment.
- ❖ Fund First Nations elementary and Post-Secondary Education, Treaty and/or regionally-based education agreements which reflect the diverse needs and circumstances of First Nations learners and schools, including bilingual and immersion First Nations language education.
- ❖ Work with academic institutions, provinces and territories, industry and foundations to double the availability of business and commerce education, scholarships and paid internships for First Nation students and the availability of skills and trades training and paid apprenticeships.
- ❖ Support the development of a First Nations Centre for Expertise in Trade and Economy with programs and support services, and data development targets.

### **Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Commit substantial investments to sustain and enhance existing First Nations Institutes of Higher Learning and community-based programming including bilingual and immersion First Nations language education.

### **In keeping with the long term objectives of First Nations, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Invest in First Nations education infrastructure that reflect First Nations needs and create safe and supportive learning spaces, including for bilingual and immersion First Nations language education.
- ❖ Support the devolution of labour market program authority to First Nations.

Less than half of First Nations students funded through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program are funded to complete a university diploma, degree or certificate.

48% of First Nations peoples on reserve possess a high school diploma, compared to 88% of non-Indigenous peoples.



## *Promise to Women: Respecting Gender Rights*

The rights, the well-being and the safety and security of First Nations women and girls have been threatened and violated for far too long. First Nations women and girls must be restored to a place of honour and respect in every part of Canada.

### **The federal government commits to work with First Nations in the first two years to:**

- ❖ Work with the AFN Women's Council to develop and apply an appropriate gender-based analysis tool for assessing gender-based needs and impacts in federal decision-making impacting First Nations including critical areas like safe housing, clean drinking water, sanitation, poverty reduction, food security, health and wellness.
- ❖ Prioritize the needs and rights of First Nations women in economic development and in the design and implementation of entrepreneurship programs and access to capital.

### **Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Ensure implementation of Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls while ensuring a families-first approach in developing a national action plan.

### **In keeping with the long term objectives of First Nations, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Take effective measures to ensure continuing improvement of women's economic and social conditions, consistent with the UN Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

First Nations women who obtain a degree or diploma earn more than their non-Indigenous counterparts with the same level of education.



## *Promise for Justice: First Nations Restorative Justice*

Too often, First Nations people are denied justice and do not receive due process as defendants. Sweeping changes must be made to ensure justice and legal systems address racism and discrimination. They must further ensure First Nations people are respected and valued. First Nations laws must stand equally beside the laws of Canada.

### **Within the first two years, the federal government will work with First Nations to:**

- ❖ Establish First Nations restorative justice systems and joint initiatives to end over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice and correctional systems.
- ❖ Acknowledge and affirm First Nations laws as part of the legal system on a footing equal to common and civil law.
- ❖ Support Indigenous Law programs at Canadian universities and First Nations post-secondary institutions.
- ❖ Ensure First Nations appointees to all levels of courts, particularly the appointment of the first First Nations Supreme Court Justice.
- ❖ Develop and implement a statutory framework recognizing First Nations Police Services as essential services with equitable funding and capacity supports.
- ❖ Support First Nations-led development and implementation of community safety and security action plans to ensure that all First Nations people – women, men, girls, boys, lesbian, gay, two-spirit and transgender and all those at risk– are free from violence.

In 2017-18, Indigenous adults accounted for 30% of all adult admissions to provincial custody and 29% of adult admissions to federal custody, despite representing 4% of the Canadian adult population.



## *Promise to Legal, Moral and Political Imperatives: First Nations Rights*

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets out the minimum standards necessary for the dignity, survival and well-being of Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Canada must lead in upholding these standards.

**Within the first two years, the federal government will work with First Nations to:**

- ❖ Introduce a government Bill supported by First Nations to implement the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples that is at least as strong as Bill C-262.
- ❖ Create a federal Treaty Commissioner's Office to support the full implementation of Treaties.
- ❖ Ensure all policies, legislation and operational practices are consistent with First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights, the UN Declaration, and with the advice of UN expert bodies.
- ❖ Review policy and legislation to ensure consistency with s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and international human rights instruments including the UN Declaration.
- ❖ Fully support a First Nations-led process on nation-building to support First Nations in exercising our right to self-determination.
- ❖ Redesign federal policies to expand First Nations land bases through affirmation of First Nations title and expansion of additions-to-reserves.
- ❖ Re-design the Specific Claims and Additions-to-Reserves processes to ensure impartial, timely and fair resolutions to outstanding specific claims.
- ❖ First Nations and Canada must act on an urgent basis to end racist and gendered violence, and all forms of discrimination, against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA) people.



## *Promise to Shared Prosperity: Equitable Funding*

Chronic under-funding of essential services means new investments are needed to reach parity to enjoy standards experienced in the rest of Canada. Changes to the ways funds are distributed will improve quality of life for First Nations and economic development for Canada as a whole.

### **Within the first two years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Make optional statutory transfers available based on agreed-to criteria and subject to performance audits by a newly created First Nations Auditor General.
- ❖ Work with Treaty First Nations on Treaty-based funding arrangements.
- ❖ Ensure budget appropriations accommodate additional population growth due to the *Descheneaux* Supreme Court decision and recent amendments to the *Indian Act*.

### **Within the first four years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Introduce legislation, supported by First Nations, to improve the ways funding is provided.

Closing the significant opportunity gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians would boost Canada's economy by \$27.7 billion annually, an approximate 1.5% boost to Canada's economy according to the *2019 National Indigenous Economic Development Board Progress Report*.

First Nations peoples receive significantly less government funding for programs and services per capita (\$8,400) when compared with Canadians who receive \$18,178 per capita in federal, provincial and municipal spending.



## *Honouring Promises: Fulfilling Promises Made*

In 2015, the Assembly of First Nations provided First Nations priorities as a plan to close the gap. Since then, we have seen concrete action and investments in several priority areas. We have considerable ground to make up to make sure First Nations and Canadians share an equal quality of life.

### **Within the first two years, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Introduce a government bill supported by First Nations to implement the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples that is at least as strong as Bill C-262.
- ❖ Initiate work to jointly align federal laws and policies with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and First Nations' Inherent and Treaty Rights.
- ❖ Support the development and implementation of restorative First Nations justice systems and implement actions to end over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice and correctional systems.
- ❖ Work with First Nations families and First Nations to implement Calls to Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

### **In keeping with the First Nations objectives, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Fully implement all Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action that fall under the responsibility of the federal government.
- ❖ Fully implement the *Indigenous Languages Act* with long-term, predictable and sustainable funding.
- ❖ Fully implement the *Act respecting First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children, Youth and Families* with long-term, predictable and sustainable funding.

We are making progress on shared decision-making. To date, the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the Crown – and leaders of the federal political parties – have provided unprecedented access to First Nations leadership at the Assembly of First Nations. Much work lies ahead to keep First Nations at the table.

**In keeping with First Nations goals, the federal government will:**

- ❖ Host a First Ministers Meeting on First Nations priorities and ensure meaningful inclusion of First Nations at all Ministerial and inter-governmental decision making tables that affect and impact First Nations rights and interests.
- ❖ Support First Nations-led processes locally, regionally and nationally, to advance First Nation priorities.
- ❖ Continue dialogue and work under the AFN-Canada MOU on Joint Priorities to ensure progress on the priorities of First Nations and facilitate relationship-building and jointly undertake a review of federal laws, regulations, procedures, policies and practices impacting First Nations rights.
- ❖ Ensure meaningful inclusion of First Nations at all Ministerial and inter-governmental decision making tables which affect and impact First Nations rights and interests.
- ❖ Build on the success of the CUSMA Advisory Panel and the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change participating in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and ensure meaningful inclusion of First Nations in international trade negotiations and other multilateral processes, such as the G7 and G20.

Self-governing First Nations score significantly higher on the Community Well-Being Index which measures education, housing, income, and labour force activity.

# Canada's Promise:

## A NEW RELATIONSHIP AND A NATIONAL AGENDA

Canada has made commitments to the people of the First Nations.

Commitments to close the gap. To ensure fair treatment. To a relationship built on respect.

We are moving toward a strong foundation to address decades of underfunding and injustice, and more than ever, we are doing so together.

This turning point in Canadian and world history requires a wake-up call focused on the state of our natural world, a commitment to ensure all children are equipped to build a prosperous future, and a promise that health, education, and justice systems will work equally for everyone.

This plan we call *Honouring Promises* points the way to real, transformative change.

The time to act is now.



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