December 9, 2010

AFN Welcomes Commitment by Government of Canada to Work with First Nations to Improve First Nations Education

Ottawa (ON) - Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo welcomed the announcement today by Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada John Duncan committing the Government of Canada to work in collaboration with First Nations to improve First Nations education.

“This is a positive development that responds directly to what First Nations leaders, citizens and students have been calling for,” said National Chief Atleo. “We do not need or want a lengthy study. We need action now and, by working together as partners, we can ensure success for our learners, the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population. Since the 1970s, our people have been leading the way in education policy and innovation that is focused on the success of the student. We know the importance of our language and culture and the critical role of our communities and parents in the success of our children. This is an opportunity to bring forward these ideas and to consider with the Government of Canada a fundamental transformation in First Nation education.”

Today in the House of Commons, Minister Duncan announced that the Government of Canada is committed to working with us, including on the appointment of a panel of experts to oversee regional engagement sessions of First Nations leaders, youth, elders and others. This process is expected to produce a report to both National Chief Atleo and Minister Duncan by the summer of 2011. The announcement comes almost a year to the day that First Nation leaders across the country stood together at an AFN Special Chiefs Assembly to support their students and learners in making education a priority, and just before the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Gatineau, Quebec to be held December 14-16.

National Chief Atleo stated: “Today, we have an opportunity to begin to look forward, to look towards affirming hope and opportunity for our children. For too long, education policy has been imposed on our people and it has failed. The tragic history and legacy of the residential schools stands in vivid testimony. There is much difficult work ahead but I know that our people, our leaders and our educators are more than ready to meet the challenge. Our work begins right away and this will be an important area for discussion
at our Special Chiefs Assembly next week. I look forward to these discussions. This is about nothing less than a better future for First Nations and a stronger Canada for all Canadians.”

The Assembly of First Nations is the national organization representing First Nations in Canada.

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