

BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



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First Ministers Meeting on Justice and Public Safety

January 22, 2020

On January 22nd, Regional Chief Terry Teegee attended the First Ministers Meeting on Justice and Public Safety in Victoria, BC. As Chair of the Assembly of First Nations' Chiefs Committee on Justice, Regional Chief Teegee was invited to address his federal and provincial colleagues. He spoke of the urgent need for legal reform in the justice system to address Canada's increasing incarceration rates of Indigenous Peoples. Regional Chief Teegee's comments highlighted the recent release of Canada's Correctional Investigator, Ivan Zinger's, report. Indigenous men and women are being imprisoned at a rate that is now surpassing 30 per cent, even though Indigenous people make up less than 5 per cent of the total Canadian population. Indigenous women account for a shocking 42 per cent of the female inmate population. Despite a long history of government commitments on improving the issue of Indigenous incarceration in Canada, the rates have continued to increase and are now at an acute level.

Regional Chief Teegee shared his message that a fundamental requirement for reversing the incarceration trend is the creation of federal legislation enshrining the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The declaration includes articles affirming the right of Indigenous peoples to create their own social systems and participate in all decision-making that affects their interests. Indigenous responsibility, control and resources for laws and justice in their own communities will begin to break down the systemic issues that lead to and overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Canadian justice system. In support of these messages, Doug White Kwul'a'sul'tun spoke on behalf of the BC First Nations Justice Council, and introduced some of the key components of the Council's Indigenous Justice Strategy. Both Regional Chief Teegee and Mr. White reiterated the need for governments to work with Indigenous communities to create and implement culturally appropriate structures that respect and reflect Indigenous approaches to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the maintenance of harmony and good order.

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