



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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NEWS RELEASE

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BCAFN Demands First Nations-led Solutions During Homelessness Action Week 2021

(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC) — The BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) honours Homelessness Action Week (October 10-16th), an annual Vancouver-based event dedicated to improving public awareness of homelessness and encouraging local solutions. In light of Homelessness Action Week 2021, the BCAFN continues to advocate for First Nations-led, evidence-based policy solutions to the complex socio-economic crisis of homelessness.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee stated, “Leaders in this province must address homelessness with the same degree of urgency as COVID-19, wildfires, and the drug toxicity crisis - all of which continue to exacerbate the homelessness crisis. Devastating wildfires have displaced so many people, the ongoing pandemic has forced providers to reduce or alter their services, and a significant portion of homeless people are suffering from potentially fatal addictions.”

Homelessness disproportionately impacts First Nations in Canada. In 2014, 18% of homeless people were Indigenous - more than twice the rate of settler Canadians. In Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, 40% of homeless people were Indigenous in 2018 and recently in Prince George, 79% of homeless people self-identified as Indigenous. Furthermore, Indigenous children account for more than 52% of children in the foster care system. Youth ageing out of care often lack adequate supports, contributing to rates of homelessness amongst First Nations. Unfortunately, the number of homeless First Nations persons is growing each year.

“Non-Indigenous Canadians have been horrified by the recent recoveries of thousands of unmarked children’s graves at former residential school sites. Now, Canadians must recognize the link between homelessness amongst First Nations and genocidal tactics such as the Residential School System and the Sixties Scoop. The legacies of these colonial policies continue to inflict trauma, suffering, and grief on our communities,” explained Regional Chief Teegee.

#honouringourancestors



The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples contains several provisions affirming Indigenous Peoples' human rights related to socio-economic wellbeing:

- Article 3: Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development;
- Article 21 (1): Indigenous Peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, among other things, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security;
- Article 21 (2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuous improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and unique needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities;
- Article 23: Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions; and
- Article 24 (2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to enjoy the highest attainable physical and mental health standards. States shall take the necessary steps to achieve the full realization of this right.

BCAFN calls on provincial and local governments to uphold their commitments to human rights and reconciliation by developing strong partnerships with First Nations service providers and collaboratively building culturally appropriate, evidence-based solutions. In addition, homelessness strategies and policies must be adequately inclusive of First Nations women and girls, Elders, youth, 2SLGBTQQA+ individuals, and persons with disabilities.

"I hold my hands up to all service providers and advocacy organizations across the province; they work tirelessly to serve our neighbours and relatives who have suffered so much and continue to suffer. In order to end chronic homelessness, we must all come together and build multi-faceted, collaborative, and humane solutions," stated Regional Chief Teegee.

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