



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### First Nations leaders from BC in Halifax for AFN Annual General Assembly

**(Mi'kma'ki, Mi'kmaw/Halifax, NS)** – The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) held their 44<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly this week, July 11th to 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in Mi'kma'ki, Mi'kmaw/Halifax, NS. This significant event brought together Chiefs, leaders, youth, Knowledge Keepers, veterans, women, and community members to engage in crucial discussions regarding the pressing issues impacting First Nations communities across Canada. Notably, approximately 60 Chiefs and proxies from British Columbia joined the Assembly in Halifax.

“The AFN’s annual assembly provides a unique opportunity for First Nations leaders to collaborate, share knowledge and develop strategies directed toward advancing rights, language and cultural preservation and socio-economic development,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “We come together to collectively address the challenges faced by our communities and elevate the voice and perspectives of leadership in shaping the future of Canada.”

The first order of business on the AFN agenda was the official induction of Joanna Bernard (Madawaska First Nation) as the interim National Chief. This appointment replaced RoseAnne Archibald who was removed from her position on June 28th, 2023, when a Special Chiefs Assembly was convened to address the report on the findings of a human resources investigation. The AFN will be holding an election for a new National Chief at the upcoming Special Chiefs Assembly scheduled for December 2023.

A highlight during the Assembly included an honouring ceremony held for Connie Walker (Okanese First Nation) where she was blanketed with a Starblanket, the guiding star represents a new beginning, the journey from darkness to the light, from ignorance to the truth. Walker and her team at Gimlet Media won a Peabody Award and a Pulitzer Prize in May for their podcast *Stolen: Surviving St. Michael's*. Over eight episodes Walker shared her experience of learning about her late father and the abuse he endured during his time at St. Michael's residential school.

During the three days of the Assembly, a total of 33 resolutions were passed, 28 on time and five emergency resolutions.

Notably, resolution 31/2023, reaffirms the declaration of the ongoing global climate emergency issued by Chiefs in assembly in 2019, which is threatening lands, waters, animals, and peoples. The resolution calls for urgent and transformative climate action through the endorsement of the AFN National Climate Strategy and its seven key priority areas. The Strategy is grounded in the vision and wisdom of Elders, the First Nations Climate Lens and years of engagement to offer a First Nations-centred approach to climate governance, policy and discussions.

#honouringourancestors



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The third and final day of the AGA featured a plenary session chaired by Regional Chief Terry Teegee on the *United Nations Declaration Act* (UNDA) National Action Plan Update. Speakers included Sara Mainville, JFK Law LLP, and Jody Wilson-Raybould, Canadian lawyer and former politician. The UNDA National Action Plan is an important roadmap for implementing the human rights of Indigenous peoples and must be appropriately funded so that First Nations are included as prominent partners. Minister David Lametti, Justice and Attorney General of Canada, met with Chiefs in the BC caucus to take questions about the UNDA National Action Plan and listen to concerns.

Furthermore, during the Assembly, Minister Marc Miller, Indigenous Services, addressed several urgent matters including Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Climate Change, Reconciliation, and Specific Claims. The Minister stressed the need for action and spoke about initiatives and reforms that are underway to drive progress on these critical issues.

Halifax is set to host another significant event shortly, the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), which is running from July 15th to the 23rd, 2023.

*The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) advocates on behalf of First Nations on issues such as treaties, Indigenous rights, and land and resources with authority to review and enforce decisions and directions brought forward through resolution.*

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