



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Merritt, BC
March 7 & 8, 2019

Resolution 03/2019

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR BILL C-91: *AN ACT RESPECTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES*

MOVED BY: KUKPI7 RON IGNACE, SKEETCHESTN INDIAN BAND

SECONDED BY: CHIEF MICHAEL LEBOURDAIS, WHISPERING PINES INDIAN BAND

DECISION: CARRIED

WHEREAS:

- A. 2019 has been designated the International Year of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to recognize the significance of Indigenous languages to matters of sustainable development, peace building and reconciliation;
- B. as stated in the report of the fifteenth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Indigenous languages form the bedrock of continuity for the survival and well-being of Indigenous cultures from one generation to the next. This important intergenerational responsibility has been severely disrupted by colonialism and colonial practices, laws, policies and practices of discrimination, assimilation, forced relocation and residential and boarding schools, among others;
- C. Indigenous languages in BC are an integral part of Indigenous identities and cultures and of Canadian heritage. BC is home to the greatest diversity of Indigenous languages in Canada (more than 50 per cent of all Indigenous languages in the country), with 34 unique First Nations languages and more than 90 dialects. Unfortunately, these languages are critically endangered due to Canada's colonial history of assimilation (including the residential school system), which led to the erosion of Indigenous languages and culture;

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Terry Teegee".

Terry Teegee, BC Regional Chief

- D. on February 5, 2019, the federal Liberals tabled Bill C-91, *An Act respecting Indigenous Languages*, with the explicit purpose of supporting and promoting the use of Indigenous languages, including the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen their languages;
- E. the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the Governments of British Columbia and Canada have adopted without qualification and have committed to implement, affirms:
Article 13(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
Article 14(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning;
- F. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action state:
Call to Action #13: We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.
Call to Action #14: We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
 1. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
 2. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
 3. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
 4. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
 5. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.**Call to Action #15:** We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-language initiatives;
- G. Bill C-91 responds to Calls to Action #13-15 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada;
- H. First Nations in BC have a vested interest in ensuring that initiatives aimed at the revitalization of Indigenous languages are:
 1. Developed collaboratively, with the full participation of First Nations in BC; and
 2. Successfully accomplish revitalization for all Indigenous languages; and
- I. the First Peoples Cultural Council has analyzed Bill C-91 and has made the following thematic recommendations to make the Act more responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities and languages:
 - a. The establishment of a national Indigenous language organization governed by Indigenous experts and at arm's length from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages;

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- b. That the Commissioner be modeled after the Official Languages Commissioner with primary roles of ombudsperson (complaints review), auditing and reporting;
- c. The Minister must fund a national Indigenous language strategy in order to meet the objective of providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of each Indigenous language in Canada;
- d. Indigenous communities and organizations must be directly funded to carry out this work
- e. The act must give explicit recognition of Indigenous sign languages;
- f. The Act must recognize that Indigenous people have the right to their language no matter where they reside, including individuals who reside away from their own communities, individuals who are incarcerated, children in the care of social services both adopted and in foster care, adults who have been disconnected from their communities through fostering or adoption, and individuals residing in hospitals or other health care facilities, independent of whether or not these individuals have "status" or other official community membership.
- g. The Act must ensure that the ownership and intellectual property rights of each language must be protected.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly supports the protection and revitalization of our Indigenous languages and supports Bill C-91, *An Act respecting Indigenous languages* to move to the committee stage to receive submissions on how it may be strengthened;
2. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the BCAFN in conjunction with AFN to analyze and prepare submissions on where Bill C-91, *An Act respecting Indigenous languages* could be strengthened, and on the Act's potential impacts on Indigenous Title and Rights;
3. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the BCAFN to prepare a letter of support and to call on all members of parliament to support the passing of the bill to committee, and to open to the act to any amendments necessary to strengthen the Act including those put forward by the First Peoples Cultural Council; and
4. the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the Regional Chief to call on the Government of BC to co-develop and implement legislation to support the revitalization and protection of Indigenous languages in BC.

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