



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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BCAFN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Resolution 11/2019

Musqueam Recreation Centre, Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Vancouver BC
September 18-20, 2019

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR CO-DEVELOPING PROVINCIAL INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES LEGISLATION

MOVED BY: SXWCHÁLTEN IY X̱ELSÍLEM, DUSTIN RIVERS, SQUAMISH NATION

SECONDED BY: KUKPI7 WAYNE CHRISTIAN, SPLATSIN

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;

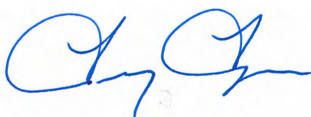
Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 18th day of September, 2019, at the Musqueam Community Centre, Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Vancouver, BC

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

Terry Teegee, BC Regional Chief

- D. 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;
- 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. On June 21, 2019, the Governor General gave royal assent to 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;
- G. First Nations in BC have a vested interested in ensuring that initiatives aimed at the revitalization of Indigenous languages are:
- A. Developed collaboratively, with the full participation of First Nations in BC; and
 - B. Successfully accomplish revitalization for all Indigenous languages; and
- H. The First Peoples Cultural Council held regional engagement sessions with First Nations in BC to inform its recommendations regarding Bill C-91. While the resulting legislation made valuable gains, it fell short of the vision expressed by First Nations during these engagement sessions and put forward by the First Peoples Cultural Council; and

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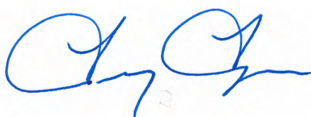
Terry Teegee, BC Regional Chief

- I. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolutions 04/2017 and 03/2019 directing 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. This builds on Resolutions 19/2007, and 05/2005 in support of language revitalization.
- J. The BCAFN, in partnership with the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, and First Peoples Cultural Council have drafted a preliminary draft Discussion Paper on BC Indigenous Languages Legislation outlining Four Pillars for a Legislative Framework.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly supports the critical nature of protecting and revitalizing our Indigenous languages, and recognizes that the 34 languages spoken in British Columbia have fewer than 1000 speakers each, with many having fewer than 100 speakers each;
2. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly supports a vision for Indigenous language vitality in British Columbia wherein all Indigenous people from BC have access and opportunity to learn their Indigenous homeland language regardless of place of residence, and where all Indigenous children have the opportunity to be educated from preschool to Grade 12 in their mother-tongue;
3. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the Regional Chief and BCAFN staff to advance work with the Province of British Columbia to co-develop provincial Indigenous languages legislation, in partnership with the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the First Peoples Cultural Council, and the First Nations Education Steering Committee;
4. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly supports the creation of a BC Languages Legislation Working Group to facilitate this work, which will be of both political and technical leads, and will be accountable to the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly. The Working Group will develop Terms of Reference, and will be mandated to:
 - a. Work with partners to co-develop provincial Indigenous languages legislation,
 - b. Engage and seek input from First Nations in BC on the draft Discussion Paper and ensure engagement and communication with First Nations throughout the process of development;
5. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the Regional Chief to work with the First Nations Summit and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs as the First Nations Leadership Council to call on the Government of BC to partner on, and fully fund, co-development and implementation of legislation to support the revitalization and protection of Indigenous languages in BC by working with the BC Languages Legislation Working Group; and
6. The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly directs the BC Languages Legislation Working Group to provide an update to the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly at the upcoming Special Chiefs Assembly in 2020.

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Terry Teegee, BC Regional Chief