



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS  
**Special Chiefs Assembly**

December 5-7, 2023

Shaw Centre – Ottawa, Ontario

*Ottawa is located on the unceded unsundered Territory of the Algonquin People.*

ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS  
**Assemblée extraordinaire des Chefs**

Du 5 au 7 décembre 2023 - Centre Shaw - Ottawa ( Ontario)

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## Economic Development

### History

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) advocates for economic policies and programs that respect First Nations' self-determination in both the market and traditional economies of First Nations while advancing economic recovery, prosperity, inclusion, and sustainability. Current advocacy efforts address cannabis, connectivity, gaming, natural resources, and trade and procurement.

The AFN works to ensure First Nations are free to pursue economic, social, and cultural development consistent with priorities set by First Nations. The focus on supporting sustainable economic development, trade, natural resources, procurement, agriculture, connectivity, and various economic policy matters.

### AFN's recent advocacy

#### **CANNABIS**

In 2022, the federal government initiated a mandated three-year review of the federal cannabis framework. The *Cannabis Act* legalized and created a framework regulating the sale, distribution, and taxation of cannabis for recreational use in Canada. As directed by First Nations-in-Assembly and the Chiefs Committee on Cannabis (CCC), the AFN advocates for the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction in the cannabis industry. To support First Nations involvement in the *Cannabis Act*, the AFN is developing a scoping paper focused on the jurisdiction and health of First Nations in the cannabis industry. A set of recommendations will be developed within the scoping paper based on the engagement sessions held with First Nations and the CCC including feedback from a virtual cannabis town hall organized by the AFN.

#### **CONNECTIVITY**

The Government of Canada has committed to connecting all those living in Canada to high-speed internet by 2030. Currently, 38% of First Nations have access to 50/10mbps and unlimited data—the minimum standard outlined by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. The AFN advocates for First Nations access to high-speed, affordable, and scalable digital connectivity by 2030.

To close the gap, the AFN submitted a pre-budget submission request to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance for an investment of \$5.2 billion over seven years to support First Nations connectivity infrastructure by 2030 to close the digital divide.

#### **GAMING**

The AFN is identifying capacity supports to implement Resolution 18/2022, *Support for Criminal Code Amendments Regarding Gaming Jurisdiction*. The resolution states that the *Criminal Code of Canada* prevents



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First Nations from entering the gaming sector unless they have a licence from a province of Canada. The AFN is advocating for amendments to section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada to recognize First Nations jurisdiction over gaming. This also includes calling on Canada to support any consequential amendments to federal legislation required to give effects to specific amendments to the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

### **PROCUREMENT**

The AFN continues to advocate for increased First Nations procurement opportunities and benefits while monitoring Canada's mandate to ensure five percent of all federal contracts are awarded to businesses managed and led by Indigenous Peoples. The Government of Canada has also implemented short-term changes to the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Business (PSIB) to better support First Nations and Indigenous businesses' access to procurement opportunities. Procurement structural capacity and support for First Nations is an important consideration.

In January 2023, National Indigenous Organizations completed a draft business plan examining the merits of establishing a collaborative national Indigenous procurement organization that would grow Indigenous economy through enhanced public and private procurement. Federal departments and agencies are also working on meeting or exceeding the 5% target by the end of the fiscal year 2024-2025.

### **TRADE**

In September 2023, an AFN delegation supported Interim National Chief Bernard in presenting at the second biannual CBNII Symposium on Indigenous Inclusion held in Auckland, New Zealand. The AFN is working on expanding trade-related economic opportunities and market access for First Nations goods and services internationally and between nations. This process includes advocating for First Nations to participate in and monitor several international collaborations and agreements such as:

- The Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Arrangement (IPETCA)
- The Central Bank Network for Indigenous Inclusion (CBNII)
- Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)
- Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).
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The AFN continues to work to ensure respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, advocating for trade and an Indigenous Peoples chapter in all trade agreements, and trade programs and processes to include space for First Nations.





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## Next Steps

### CANNABIS

The review of the *Cannabis Act* will be carried out by an independent panel of experts appointed by the Minister of Health. The AFN's cannabis scoping paper will be submitted to the Expert Panel for their consideration in their final report. The AFN will advocate that the Government of Canada and its Expert Panel engage directly with First Nations on the legislative review. The AFN will seek guidance from the CCC regarding the *Cannabis Act* and the recommendations from the scoping paper.

### CONNECTIVITY

First Nations engagement is needed to develop a First Nations connectivity strategy to ensure 100% of First Nations have high-speed digital connectivity by 2030 and are not abandoned in closing the digital divide. The AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations connectivity funding, criteria, and access to connectivity programs, training, and spectrum to support the closure of the digital divide between First Nations and Canada.

### GAMING

The AFN will seek funding to support the work of the CCC and seek out key amendments as outlined in Resolution 18/2022. Asserting inherent jurisdiction over gaming and recognition from governments will continue to be a priority as First Nations move to fully participate in the Canadian gaming economy. As capacity support is secured, the AFN and the Chiefs Committee on Gaming (CCG) will identify a path forward in engaging governments.

### PROCUREMENT

To support Canada's achievement of a five percent Indigenous procurement target, the AFN will advocate for First Nations' access to procurement supports and capacity, trade opportunities, quality data, and changes to the contracting environment. As mandated by Resolution 73/2023, the AFN will call on the government of Canada to provide financial support to establish a First Nations-led Procurement Organization for the benefit of First Nations and First Nations businesses. The Chiefs' Committee on Economic Development (CCED) continues to offer guidance on the creation of a First Nations-led procurement organization.

### TRADE

The AFN will continue to advocate for First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights to be upheld in negotiations for international trade and investment agreements and for the inclusion of an Indigenous Peoples' chapter in all future trade agreements. In addition, the AFN will continue to seek the guidance of the CCED and engage with First Nations leaders and technical officials on the type of programs and services needed for First Nations trade.

#### Contact:

Alison Anderson, Director, Economic Development Sector,  
[aanderson@afn.ca](mailto:aanderson@afn.ca)