



## National Chief Report

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## Annual Report from the National Chief

Wahcheeyay Misiway,

As I complete my first year in office, I remain the same calm, heart-centered, and respectful leader that I always aim to be.

### **ADVANCING CHANGE: A COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP**

I continue to be purposeful in embodying a style of leadership that is inclusive; one that's grounded in love and care and embodies a great respect for everyone I interact with. I believe effective leadership is the opposite of micromanagement. Therefore, I always create space for other leaders to do their own work, to lead their own files, and to acknowledge that accomplishments are shared with our full AFN Executive team.

My leadership style is collaborative, and I believe in creating space for Regional Chiefs to lead their portfolios as well as their regions without interference from my Office. I am here to offer assistance and guidance and any administrative support needed but the decision-making comes strictly from their offices. I'm proud to report that between July 2021 to July 2022 the Executive Committee gathered 26 times to discuss many important issues with many decisions made and motions passed. We've also hosted monthly information and update sessions where we share what the National Chief's Office is working on in any given month.

### **KEY ACTIONS**

*While many priorities are ongoing, as I look back at all that we accomplished in our advocacy efforts this year, I recognize that we are closer to finding solutions to longstanding issues. Over the past year, we undertook the following:*

- Despite ongoing lockdowns, travelled through BC, SK, MB, ON, QB, and NS regions.
- Held an unprecedented number of Executive Meetings and Info Sessions: 26 in 1 year
- Connected Chiefs to Ministers as requested
- Developed the Healing Path Forward document to influence party platforms in the 44th federal election
- Kept national/international spotlight on issues: APTN, BBC, CBC, CNN, CTV, JUNOS
- Brought national attention to Mi'kmaq peoples' inherent and Treaty rights to fishing
- Participated in Nuu-chah-nulth Fishing Rights
- Established separate East Coast / West Coast Fisheries Portfolios
- Marked the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with a Drum for the Children event at Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc
- Visited flooded communities in Nicola Valley in December and March
- Attended the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues to invite the Special Rapporteur to Canada to investigate the deaths of our Children
- Developed a proposal to establish a National Prosperity Table

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- Called for a New Economic Deal to ensure long overdue sharing of wealth with First Nations
- Requested Knowledge Keepers assistance with a healing process for staff issues
- Spoke to House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance to discuss the impact of the Emergencies Act on First Nations
- Advocated for a National Council for Reconciliation (TRC Calls 53-56) which will result in legislation eventually being introduced by the federal government

## UNIQUE JUNCTURE IN HISTORY

As you know, to be in leadership this past year has been both extraordinary and extraordinarily challenging. We are emerging from pandemic life, a minority federal government working under a supply and confidence agreement, states of emergency due to climate change, convoy protests, papal and royal visits, and above all, collectively grieving the little ones who did not return home from institutions of assimilation and genocide. I would like to commend you on your dedication and work during these unprecedented times. With you, I am hopeful about the future, eager to put in the hard work, and motivated by the momentum we've built together as First Nations leaders.

This is a special time for us as First Nations people. There are so many good things for our people to celebrate and so many firsts that we can acknowledge and hold each other up for. This includes, the increased allyship and empathy from non-Indigenous people around

the world regarding unmarked gravesites and the international interest to hold the churches and governments accountable. We've also done two unprecedented things within the Assembly of First Nations with the creation of a National Caucus of Elected Women Leaders and establishment of a 2SLGBTQQA+ Council. With your help, we're looking toward a promising future that is prosperous and bright.

## AFN ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Coming out of the pandemic and years of restricted travel, the Assembly of First Nations is back on the international scene.

Whether showing up to support issues of global importance such as fishing disputes and First Nations sovereignty, appearing before the House of Commons to express concerns about what the use of the Emergencies Act could mean for First Nations, or participating in special federal budget media coverage, it is my pleasure to stand up, advocate for you, and be a positive voice for progress.

At the United Nations Headquarters in New York this April, I got to meet Indigenous leaders and land defenders from the global community, such as Colombia, Guatemala, and Ukraine. We share many common issues as we each belong to UN member states who continue to grow rich and benefit from the suppression and oppression of our



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Indigenous Nations. We are all water keepers and stewards of our lands, and it was good to make important connections that initiate dialogue and foster Indigenous solidarity from Turtle Island and beyond.

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*When the AFN Executive works cooperatively and in a united manner, we can accomplish many things. This past year, we can highlight the following results of our great work together:*

- The largest class action settlement in Canadian history, \$40 billion (RC Woodhouse)
- Canadian flag lowered for Indigenous Veterans Day for the first time in history
- Historic apology to Survivors by Pope Francis at the Vatican (RC Antoine)
- Worked with Chiefs on Charter changes to establish a 2SLGBTQIA+ Council (Khelsilem, Chief Bissailion)
- Secured \$6.2 million funding for the National Caucus of Elected Women Leaders with \$150,000 for all regional offices
- Canada appoints a Special Interlocuter to study the issue of unmarked gravesites
- Secured \$4.4 million in funding for First Nations Emergency Services Society during flood crisis in BC (RC Teegee)
- Advocated for funding to search former Institutions, government subsequently announced \$320 million
- \$4 billion announced by Canada in new housing funding

## STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

Every day since my election as National Chief, I have been connecting with Regional Chiefs and federal partners across Canada to ensure that First Nations priorities are top of mind and commitments are followed through.

As you'll note in my Key Meetings table, video conferencing has afforded us an opportunity to connect online more regularly, allowed me to connect Chiefs with Ministers, and altogether expedite our work in the best way. This has resulted in having direct lines of communication with Ministers and key leadership across Turtle Island.

It's been a pleasure to already visit six regions (QC, NS, ON, MB, SK, BC) so far this year and with restrictions easing, I look forward to travelling through more of our beautiful lands, territories, and waters in the months and years ahead.

## KEY MEETINGS AND EVENTS

*Meetings are essential to moving the work forward and I'm grateful to highlight the following in-person, Zoom, and teleconference meetings from the past year:*

### First Nations

- Grand Chief Abram Benedict, *Mohawk Council of Akwesasne*
- Grand Chief Alison Linklater, *Mushkegowuk Council*
- Grand Council Chief Reg Niganobe, *Anishinabek Nation*
- Grand Chief Garrison Settee, *Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak*

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- Grand Chief Kahsennehawe Sky-Deer, *Kahnawake*
- Chief Peter Collins, *Fort William First Nation*
- Chief Leroy Denny, *Eskasoni First Nation*
- Chief Cadmus Delorme, *Cowessess First Nation*
- Chief Darrel Draney, *Skeetchestn First Nation*
- Chief Paul Gladu, *Sand Point First Nation*
- Chief Marcus Hardy, *Red Rock Indian Band*
- Chief Fabian Head, *Red Earth Cree Nation*
- Chief Mark Hill, *Six Nations*
- Chief Lee Ketchemonia, *Keeseekoose First Nation*
- Chief Francis Laceese, *Tsilhqot'in*
- Chief Arnold Lampreau, *Shackan Indian Band*
- Chief Greg Louie, *Ahousaht First Nation*
- Chief Harvey McLeod, *Upper Nicola Band*
- Chief David Masakeyash, *Mishkeegogamang First Nation*
- Chief David Monias, *Pimicikamak Cree Nation*
- Chief Fred Robbins, *Esketemc First Nation*
- Chief Willie Sellars, *Williams Lake First Nation*
- Chief Wayne Sparrow, *Musqueam First Nation*
- Chief Gladys Thompson, *Rocky Bay First Nation*
- Chief Janet Webster, *Lytton First Nation*
- Chief Emily Whetung, *Curve Lake First Nation*
- President Natan Obed, *Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami*

## Ministers and Other Dignitaries

- Charles, *Prince of Wales & Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall*
- Governor General Mary Simon
- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Tk'emlúps, Williams Lake)
- NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh

- Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, *Finance*
- Minister Marc Miller, *Crown-Indigenous Relations Canada*
- Minister Patty Hadju, *Indigenous Services Canada*
- Minister David Lametti, *Attorney General & Justice*
- Minister Marco Mendicino, *Public Safety*
- Minister Joyce Murray, *Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard*
- Minister Pablo Rodriguez, *Canadian Heritage*
- Minister Steven Guilbeault, *Environment and Climate Change*
- Minister Marci Ien, *Women and Gender Equality and Youth*
- Minister Omar Alghabra, *Transport*
- Minister Karina Gould, *Families, Children and Social Development*
- Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, *Natural Resources*
- President Fawn Sharp, *National Congress of American Indians*
- Bob Rae, *Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations*
- Susannah Goshko, *High Commissioner of the United Kingdom*
- José Francisco Calí Tzay, *UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*
- Alicia Buenrostro Massieu, *Deputy Permanent Representative for UN in Mexico*
- Stephanie Scott, *Executive Director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation*
- Catherine Tait, *CEO of CBC*

## One-to-One Information Sharing Meetings with Regional Chiefs

*In addition to regular meetings with Regional Chiefs throughout the year, I had the following one-to-one meetings. I will schedule the remaining one-to-one meetings for after the AGA.*



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- Regional Chief Kluane Adamek, *Yukon*
- Regional Chief Joanna Bernard, *New Brunswick*
- Regional Chief Glen Hare, *Ontario*
- Regional Chief Ghislain Picard, *Québec/Labrador*
- Regional Chief Paul Prosper, *Nova Scotia*
- Regional Chief Terry Teegee, *British Columbia*

## THE HEALING PATH FORWARD

As National Chief, I continue to take measured steps on the Healing Path Forward including:

1. Truth, Reconciliation and Healing for First Nations and all Canadians,
2. Defending and Promoting Inherent and Treaty Rights, and
3. A New Economic Deal for First Nations – National Prosperity Table.

The Healing Path Forward is about how to build a better future for everyone across Turtle Island, one that creates greater equity and equality for First Nations and prepares

us for challenges such as climate change and post-pandemic recovery.

## Climate Change

As COVID-19 becomes endemic, we must continue to address climate change to rebalance our relationship with all of Creation. Since experiencing the effects of many extreme climate crises this year alone, it's clear there's no more pressing issue for our communities, Turtle Island, and all of humanity than protecting our lands, waters, and resources. First Nations perspectives will lead to the development of climate solutions that are holistic, multi-dimensional, and interconnected; focused on simultaneously addressing decarbonization and decolonization.

## A New Economic Deal for First Nations

Truth and reconciliation must include economic reconciliation. We must work toward a new economic deal, one that allows First Nations the autonomy, the self-determination, and the self-government that is guaranteed to us under the constitution

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and one that is about sharing the wealth of this country fairly. I met with Minister Patty Hajdu shortly after the budget announcement and she expressed interest in funding a national prosperity table which could be the vehicle for defining the new economic deal.

## Women, Youth, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Peoples

We owe the preservation and protection and care of this inheritance to our communities including our most marginalized: Women, Youth, and 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples. To this end, the National Caucus of Elected Women Leaders will meet for the first time this summer and the first meeting of 2SLGBTQIA+ Council is taking place here at the 43rd Annual General Assembly. Further, we are in dialogue with the AFN Youth Council on how my office can assist them in meeting their goals nationally.

But it doesn't stop there. There is still much work to be done as leaders on the Healing Path Forward and many other voices we need at the table as well, such as people with disabilities. We owe it to future generations to express our sacred gifts, be active partners in decision making, and push back against the colonial system. I want future generations to look back at this time and see how it was a turning point in history.

## Institutions of Assimilation and Genocide: Papal Apology

And while we continue to press for accountability, one of the top priorities in the Healing Path Forward is to assure that all survivors of institutions of assimilation and genocide and intergenerational trauma—as well as those yet to recover—are always acknowledged and honoured.

I did not take part in the Vatican visit myself, but I appreciate the delegates who travelled to Rome to tell their stories on behalf of survivors. While I am pleased with the outcome of private and public meetings with His Holiness Pope Francis in March, I am concerned with Pope Francis' visit to Turtle Island this month. I am not planning to greet the Pope when he comes to Canada because at the time of writing this report, there are no confirmed visits to former residential institutions. I do look forward to hearing his words of apology on our traditional lands which will fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #58.

## Special Rapporteur

We'll also continue to call for justice, accountability, and independent investigations. In November 2021, I wrote to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights seeking full redress, including criminal prosecutions, sanctions, and other remedies. I am requesting a formal meeting with the Special Rapporteur to explore options internationally through the United Nations. In addition, the International Criminal Court remains an option to pursue for the Assembly of First Nations.

It's our hope that we can simultaneously seek and find justice and healing domestically with the Canadian government through their Special Interlocutor as well as internationally with the UN Special Rapporteur.



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## Languages

We welcome the Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Our languages are vital because they connect us to everything: our families, our communities, our land, and our nationhood.

Today and throughout the decade ahead, let's walk the Healing Path Forward as we lift up language champions and every single Indigenous person relearning to speak their language and sing the songs of their ancestors. We all have a sacred and spiritual obligation to protect and revitalize Indigenous languages.

## CONCLUSION

As a longstanding leader with over 33 years of experience, I've learned that a leader by themselves can do very little. It's other leaders and staff who really do the heavy lifting and can ensure a successful mandate.

With that, I would like to say Meegwetch to all the Regional Chiefs, Grand Chiefs, Chiefs and Councillors, and all levels of leadership who are making a difference across Turtle Island. I'm looking forward to our journey together as we make positive and evolutionary changes where we can realize our vision of happy, healthy children surrounded by the love and care of their families, living in safe and vibrant communities. The positive vision for the future includes a healthy Assembly of First Nations organization where everyone feels safe, acknowledged, and empowered.

I also want to lift up the National Chief's Office and Secretariat staff at the Assembly of First Nations for your support, your expertise,

knowledge and particularly for your commitment. Despite the challenges we have faced, you have done a tremendous job.

## AWARDS & RECOGNITION

*I'm very grateful that my work is being acknowledged; however, it's important to note that I share these awards with my staff, the AFN Executive, and all Chiefs across Canada.*

- Vaccine Heroes of 2021: The Star
- Top 100 most influential people in federal politics: The Hill Times
- Maclean's Power List: 50 Canadians who are forging paths, leading the debate, and shaping how we think
- Top 25 Women of Influence of 2022
- Mother of the Year: Because Mothers Matter Awards
- Humanitarian of the Year: Weengushk Film Institute

I am calling for us to be united in our efforts to best advocate and work for the people in our communities. As our Elders say, we must now embrace the great responsibilities and opportunities that are on the horizon.

There is a Healing Path Forward and we will get there by working together.

In closing, in my Cree dialect, I say, "Ninanaskamon" (I am grateful, I am thankful, I thank you) and "Kisahkeetin" (I love you).

National Chief RoseAnne Archibald