



OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL CHIEF

NCO QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023





Welcome to May! The blessings of spring include the return of longer days and sprouting flowers that speak to renewal and rebirth. I'm hopeful that the weeks ahead will bring us what we need to grow, evolve, and heal and I wish you continued positivity and warmth as we walk towards the summer.

Lest We Forget

Since my last SCA report, submitted November 4, 2022, I was grateful to attend many honouring ceremonies and events for Indigenous Veterans in Vancouver and Batchewana First Nation. After attending the events, I laid wreaths in Goulais Bay and Obadjiwan. Let us always remember and honour our heroes who made the noblest of sacrifices, on Remembrance Day and every day.





I was moved to see so many familiar faces at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials in January. I look to Regional Chief Gerald Antoine to continue his good work as portfolio holder. I will continue to advocate for the proper archives and documents in holding those accountable to ensure the safe return and justice for our little ones across Turtle Island.



Unmarked Burials

There is much healing to be done across our many Nations and I continue to call for a National Healing Fund. This report, we especially hold space for Star Blanket Cree Nation, Wauzhushk Onigum Nation, Williams Lake First Nation, Keeseekoose First Nation, and Tseshah First Nation as they grieve the findings of unmarked burials in their communities. Chi-meegwetch Chief Michael Starr, Chief Chris Skead, Chief Willie Sellars, Chief Lee Kitchemonia, and Chief Councillor Ken Watts for allowing me to visit your homelands and pay my respects to the families.





Strengthening Our Sisterhood

As women, we are asserting ourselves in our rightful leadership roles, strengthening our relationships with one another, and ensuring a better future for our next generation.

I was honoured to be a part of many events in the last quarter, that honour our women warriors. Meegwetch to Nishnawbe Aski Nation for your women’s gathering, Treaty One for inviting me to attend headdress ceremonies for Grand Chief Cathy Merrick and Regional Chief Cindy Woodhouse, and chi-meegwetch always to our grassroots women, such as the honouring I attended for Daphne Edwards in Cheam First Nation.

My staff and I also met with Minister Marci Ien to discuss the National Caucus of Women Leaders and other items that fall under the women’s file such as the 2SLGBTQIA+ Council



and Youth. Minister Ien spoke highly of her time as co-host on CTV’s The Social, a program which I was invited to guest-host on February 24. On show day, I was happy to wear beadwork by Mish Daniels from Sagkeeng First Nation representing MMIWG.

For the remainder of this term as National Chief, my number-one focus is and will be MMIWG. Every First Nation person is affected by this crisis – whether directly or indirectly, we’re united in our grief. This year’s Women’s Memorial March in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side was supported by 5000 people this year and I was humbled and honoured to be asked to place tobacco & offer prayers, alongside Elders.



As we danced in a new season in Naotkamegwanning—the home of the jingle dress, first worn by Maggie White—I felt refreshed and encouraged to continue

to honour the women in our communities and uphold our sacred responsibility to protect one another.

Increasing Women in Leadership

- Michelle Glasgow, first female chief of the Sipekne'katik First Nation
- Chief Kim Bressette, Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
- Emma Morrison, Miss World Canada 2022
- Autumn Peltier, finalist for the International Children's Peace Prize
- Chief Elizabeth Kataquapit, Fort Albany First Nation's first female Chief
- Caroline Cochrane, first Métis woman premiere of NWT
- Yvonne "Bonnie" Bressette, first female Chief of Kettle and Stony Point, Order of Canada appointee
- Grand Chief Cathy Merrick, the first woman GC of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
- Elder Darlene McIntosh, UNBC's eighth Chancellor and first from Lheidli T'enneh Nation
- Doreen Spence from Saddle Lake Cree Nation named to Order of Canada
- Chief Justice Shannon Smallwood, first Indigenous person to serve as the NWT Supreme Court's chief justice
- Chief Angela Levasseur, the first female chief elected in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation
- Sydney Daniels, College Scout for the Winnipeg Jets
- Chief Irene Neeposh and Deputy Chief Rhonda Oblin Cooper, first for both positions in Cree First Nation of Waswanipi
- Iakoiehwáhtha Patton, first female First Nations Rhodes Scholar



Working Together

A few months ago, I announced that I had hired well-known First Nations-federal relations policy analyst Russ Diabo to join my team as a Special Advisor. His role is to advise on how to create space for a diversity of views not always represented at the AFN regarding Sovereignty, Jurisdiction, protection of Inherent and Treaty Rights and Land back.

Further, I regularly connect with like-minded, like-hearted leaders such as Métis National Council President Cassidy Caron, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President Natan Obed, and National Congress of American Indians President Fawn Sharp. As Indigenous leaders, it's important to work towards a collective positive vision and we can only do that together, shoulder to shoulder. President Caron, President Obed, and I regularly meet with the Governor General Mary Simon to discuss our relationship with the Crown.

We also continue to extend our willingness to work with our federal partners and walk that healing path forward. At the end of November, the AFN Executive Committee held a meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to discuss their region's priorities. We were also grateful to have Minister Marc Miller and Minister Patty Hajdu join us.



Highlighted meetings

- 2SLGBTQIA+ Council
- AMC Assembly
- APC All Chiefs and Councils Assembly
- Chief Ava Bear, Muskoday First Nation
- Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, Agriculture and Agri-Food
- Bora Laskin Faculty of Law Indigenous Law Conference
- Chief Wally Burns, James Smith First Nation
- MNC President Cassidy Caron & ITK President Natan Obed
- Chief Bessie Chasse, White River First Nation
- Chief Jeff Copenace, Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation
- Chief Keith Corston, Chapeau Cree First Nation
- Council of Yukon First Nations Potlatch Week
- Dene Leadership Meeting
- Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, Health
- Equal Voice Foundation
- First Nations Housing Professionals Association
- Minister Chrystia Freeland, Finance
- Chief Jason Gauthier, Missanabie Cree First Nation
- Minister Patty Hajdu, Indigenous Services
- New Zealand High Commissioner Martin Harvey
- Chief Lorne Stanley Houle, Whitefish Lake first Nation
- Khelsilem, Squamish Nation
- Chief Lee Kitchemonia, Keeseekoose First Nation



The Sports World

For First Nations, sports are so much more than a form of entertainment or a fun pastime: they're a way of making memories,

expressing our resiliency, and advancing healthy bodies and healthy communities.

Nootkamegwanning First Nation hosted me in their community and provided me with a tour of the local school. They had a long history of successful intramural sports and are proud of the many volleyball championships under their belt.

The CFL Commissioner invited me to perform the coin toss at the 109th Grey Cup, hosted this year by Treaty Four. I was happy to meet Jeff McWhinney, Keeper of the Cup, who shared several stories with me, about his role and many connections he has made across Turtle Island, including with First Nations.

Like you, I was saddened by the passing of the great Gino Odjick. It was an honour to attend the Celebration of Life for Gino in Musqueam, where he lived for many years, and say a few words to his family and loved ones. As well, I attended the 5th Annual First Nations Celebration hosted by the Vancouver Canucks.





Leaders Today

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and uplift our young people. First Nations Youth are truly a bright light who are leaders tomorrow and leaders today.

One of the ways they're leading is by learning to speak their language and singing the songs of their ancestors. At the Stolen Sisters Memorial March in Victoria, I appreciated hearing Christina Enns give the opening and closing prayers fluently in her Nuu-chah-nulth language. In Onigaming First Nation, I visited the roundhouse where the students from the local school greeted me with a heartfelt song and the Chief and I were blanketed. And during my visit to Muskoday First Nation Community School, it was such a blessing to see our little ones sing in Cree and listen to the Tipi Teaching of "sâkhitowin" ("to love one another"). These are precious moments for me as National Chief.

In February, I was grateful to host a sharing circle for Indigenous content creators. My co-host, TikTok Canada, was very receptive to our concerns to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Youth online. By chance, I also connected with award-winning rapper/musician Mattmac at the airport in Winnipeg. And you may have seen Student Council Chief Derek Monias at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay interview Ryan Reynolds. I love to see First Nations Youth using their voices, dreaming big, and travelling far!

- Minister Marco Mendicino, Public Safety
- AMC Grand Chief Cathy Merrick
- Minister Marc Miller, Crown-Indigenous Relations
- New Brunswick Chiefs Meeting
- Northern Spotted Owl Breeding Program
- UN Ambassador Bob Rae
- Minister Greg Rickford, Northern Development
- Chief Shelley Sabattis & Dr. Allan Sabattis, Oromocto First Nation
- Chief Dean Sayers, Batchewana First Nation
- Governor General Mary Simon
- Jagmeet Singh, NDP Leader
- Chief Michael Starr, Star Blanket First Nation
- Sioux Valley Dakota Nation
- Sipekne'katik Chief & Council
- Chief Chris Skead, Wauzhushk Onigum Nation
- Chief Cheryl St. Denis, Brunswick House First Nation
- Treaty 1 Chiefs
- Treaty 6 Chiefs
- Tsleil-Waututh Nation Chief and Council
- Chief Rudy Turtle, Grassy Narrows First Nation
- Minister Dan Vandal, Northern Affairs
- Chief Andrew Victor, Cheam First Nation
- Chief Councillor Ken Watts, Tseshaht First Nation



Conclusion

A highlight of this quarter was a successful December SCA! Looking out at the crowd as we held a standing ovation for Cindy Blackstock in her pursuit of justice for our children was a proud moment. Our FNIA also unified on key issues such as advancing gender equity in leadership and the rejection of Bill C-21.

While the everyday acts of love and care and hard work of AFN staff continues to uplift and advance First Nations priorities, we appreciate the progress we've made on the healing path forward in the face of a challenging year. We're hopeful that 2023 will continue to bring the positive transformation that's essential to the health of our organization while upholding our values, our cultures, our beliefs, and our seven sacred teachings, modelled to us with dignity and grace by the matriarchs in our communities. Let's continue to do our good work together.

The next newsletter will highlight all the good work we do this spring.

Ninanaskamon!



For a full meeting list visit www.afn.ca/national-chief/

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