



Special Chiefs Assembly

Strengthening Our Relations

December 3-5, 2024

EXECUTIVE REPORT





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National Chief's Winter Update: Determining Our Future, Our Way



Greetings Chiefs, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Women, Youth, and all guests gathered here on Unceded Algonquin Territory in Ottawa for this Special Chiefs Assembly.

It is an honour to welcome you as we come together to deliberate on the critical issues facing First Nations. As always, I am inspired by the dedication and passion you bring to this work. The strength of our Assembly lies in the voices of our Chiefs and delegates, who guide our shared advocacy and priorities for the benefit of First Nations across Turtle Island.

This month marks one year since I had the privilege of being elected as your National Chief. Over the past 12 months, I have traveled from coast to coast to coast, connecting with Chiefs and communities. Your priorities are my priorities, and I value the perspectives you bring that reflect the needs of your regions and communities.

While our Nations are diverse, we are united by shared principles: the empowerment of First Nation families to care for our children, the mutual belief that Canada will not realize its full potential until the full power of our First Nations economy is fully unleashed, and the pursuit of justice, sovereignty, and self-determination. These are the core beliefs that bring us together for the betterment of First Nations.

Over the past year, we have worked hard in many advocacy areas to bring meaningful change to policing, education, water, economic reconciliation, and many other priorities. It is an honour to share updates on how far we have come, and how much we can accomplish with our collective power as First Nations.





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Highlights from the 45th Annual General Assembly – July 2024

In July, we convened the 45th Annual General Assembly (AGA) on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation in Montreal, Québec. Over 2,400 Chiefs, proxies, Elders, youth, and delegates attended to engage in critical dialogue and deliberations. During the AGA, 67 resolutions were brought forward, and 54 were passed. These resolutions will shape the AFN's advocacy and strengthen our collective efforts for years to come. We were honoured to welcome distinguished guests, including Ministers of Public Safety, Justice, Indigenous Services, and Crown-Indigenous Relations, as well as leaders of the opposition parties.



Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services

After more than two months of in-person, virtual and community engagements, the feedback gathered was used to negotiate a series of amendments to the Draft Agreement. These amendments were agreed upon by all parties and incorporated into a revised Draft Agreement presented to First Nations-in-Assembly during the Special Chiefs Assembly on Treaty 7 Territory in Calgary, Alberta, in October 2024.

First Nations-in-Assembly passed AFN Resolution #60/2024, *Addressing Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program and Jordan's Principle*, and AFN Resolution #61/2024, *Meaningful Consultation on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services*, providing the AFN with clear direction to call on Canada to seek a new mandate and return to negotiations. The AFN formally informed Canada of this new direction and urged them to re-enter negotiations.

Since the passing of these resolutions, the AFN has informed Canada of this new direction and urged them to seek a new mandate and re-enter negotiations. To date, Canada has not provided a response regarding their mandate or a commitment to return to the negotiation table.

We have not yet received a response from Canada about seeking a new mandate to return to negotiations. While we wait for their commitment, we have taken steps to implement the directives of Resolutions 60/2024 and 61/2024. This includes exploring mechanisms to advance the principles of the resolutions and inviting the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to rejoin the process to ensure a collaborative approach moving forward. The AFN remains committed to the long-term reform of the FNCFS Program and will continue to provide updates as we follow the direction of the First Nations-in-Assembly.



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OTHER DEVELOPMENTS: FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN

In addition to progress on long-term reform of the FNCFS program, we welcomed several significant developments since June 2024:

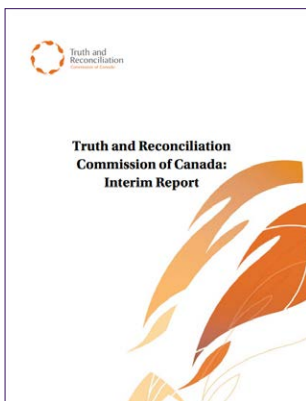
- Federal Court approved a distribution protocol for the \$23 billion compensation package. This marks an important step toward moving forward with the application and payment process.
- On November 21, 2024, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered Canada to address the backlog of Jordan's Principle requests.

We welcomed the Tribunal's directive for all Parties to collaborate on interim solutions while continuing negotiations for the long-term reform of Jordan's Principle. The AFN remains committed to addressing the delays and barriers that First Nations children continue to face.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) continues to be guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action (CTAs) in its work. Alongside resolutions passed by Chiefs-in-Assembly, these Calls to Action remain central to our efforts to advance truth and reconciliation.

In June 2024, the AFN released its annual assessment of progress on the 94 Calls to Action. Over the past year, only one additional CTA was completed. In relation to CTA #53, Bill C-29, *An Act to Provide for the Establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation*, received Royal Assent. While this was a step forward, the Bill did not meet key aspects of CTA #53, including provisions for adequate funding and a clear process for appointing members to the Board of Directors.



In October 2024, we acknowledged the release of the final report from Special Interlocutor Kimberly R. Murray, which outlined an Indigenous-led Reparations Framework for Missing and Disappeared Children and Unmarked Burials. The report is an important contribution to addressing the legacy of residential institutions and advancing First Nations-led solutions.



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REMEMBERING JUSTICE MURRAY SINCLAIR

In November, Justice Murray Sinclair passed away. Mazina Giizhik-abun (the One Who Speaks of Pictures in the Sky) committed his life in service to the people - creating change, revealing truth, and leading with fairness throughout his career.

"First Nations from coast to coast to coast are in mourning. We are all devastated by the loss of Justice Murray Sinclair. He was not only a tremendous advocate for the rights of First Nations Peoples, but also a transformational force in the pursuit of Reconciliation.

Justice Sinclair's leadership brought us this far in the Reconciliation journey, and his work will continue to inspire for generations to come. His work as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was groundbreaking and brought Canada's shameful colonial history into the forefront of the nation.

The Commission's 94 Calls to Action have acted as guiding principles for legislation, funding, policies and procedures that will continue closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians."

– National Chief, Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, Assembly of First Nations



Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice

As National Chief, I am committed to advancing the rights and safety of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, guided by the resolutions passed by First Nations-in-Assembly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and the 2019 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). These frameworks provide a path forward and call on all leaders, governments, institutions, and communities to address systemic violence and create lasting change.

At the AFN Annual General Assembly, First Nations-in-Assembly passed a resolution supporting efforts to accelerate the National Action Plan to implement the MMIWG Calls for Justice. This work aims to address the urgent need for solutions to combat systemic violence against First Nations women, girls,



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and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. Another resolution called for the establishment of an Independent Commission of Inquiry into the deaths of Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe, as well as the responses of the Winnipeg Police Service and the previous Manitoba government to requests to search a local landfill. In August, the AFN urged Manitoba's Lieutenant Governor to establish a Commission of Inquiry and highlight the need for this inquiry to be led by First Nations commissioners and guided by First Nations laws and protocols.

Following the meeting with Manitoba's Lieutenant Governor on Treaty One Territory in Winnipeg, we honoured the memory of Tina Fontaine, who tragically passed away on August 13, 2014, at the age of 15. As we remembered Tina, we reaffirmed our commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all First Nations children—a fundamental right that must be protected.

Addressing the crisis of violence against Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and fully implementing all 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry are critical priorities. The lack of meaningful progress remains unacceptable. Over the coming year, the AFN will continue to press all levels of government to act decisively to protect First Nations women, girls, and children and to uphold their rights to safety and security.



REMEMBERING MANITOBA GRAND CHIEF CATHY MERRICK

In September, Manitoba Grand Chief Cathy Merrick passed away suddenly on the steps of a Manitoba courthouse fighting injustice against First Nations. Chiefs from across Canada honoured Grand Chief Merrick at our October Special Assembly.

"As we pray with Chief Merrick's family and friends, we reflect on her lifetime of achievement, the thousands of lives she touched and the generation of First Nation leaders she inspired.

First Nations have lost a legendary matriarch. Canada has lost a one-of-a-kind leader. Personally, I have lost a friend, a trusted mentor and role model.

As Grand Chief starts her spirit journey, and as we process the grief and monumental loss of her presence in this world, we will find the strength to carry on in her name.

To honour her life here, we will redouble our work to end violence against First Nation women and girls, unify families, preserve our language and fight for justice."

– National Chief, Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, Assembly of First Nations



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First Nations Policing

At the AFN Annual General Assembly, Canada's Minister of Public Safety reaffirmed his mandate to introduce federal legislation recognizing First Nations policing as an essential service, supported by long-term, stable, and recurring funding. Despite this commitment, the federal government has yet to deliver. No legislation has been introduced, no funding commitments have been made, and there has been no formal recognition of First Nations' jurisdiction over policing.

In the past four months, First Nations families and communities have mourned the loss of over 12 individuals who died during interactions with non-First Nations police forces. This ongoing crisis highlights the urgent need for reform to ensure the safety and dignity of First Nations people.

At the Special Chiefs Assembly in October 2024, Chiefs-in-Assembly expressed their support for the families and communities grieving these losses, including the family of Jon Wells, a member of the Kainai/Blood Tribe who tragically passed away during an encounter with the Calgary Police Service on September 17, 2024.

First Nations have continued to call for the use of de-escalation techniques and culturally informed practices in all police interactions to protect all First Nations people. Immediate changes are needed to ensure our safety. It is critical that we work together to develop and implement strategies that improve the safety of First Nations.

In September, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) granted the AFN's motion to intervene in the Police Chiefs of Ontario complaint regarding equitable funding of First Nation policing services. The CHRT rejected Canada's motion to narrow the scope on the complaint. The trial is expected to start early in 2025.

In November, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) applauded the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Quebec (Attorney General) v. Pekuakamiulnuatsh Takuhikan*. The ruling affirms that the Government of Quebec breached its obligations to act in good faith and uphold the Honour of the Crown when negotiating tripartite policing agreements with First Nations.

We lift up Chiefs from across this country for their ongoing leadership regarding First Nations policing. Over the coming months we will build on your experience and these decisions to advocate for jurisdictional recognition, long-term funding and essential service legislation.





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Economic Reconciliation

Economic reconciliation has been a significant focus of our work this year, reflecting not only Canada's moral and legal obligations but also the tremendous opportunity it represents for future generations. For decades, Canada and the provinces have allocated rights to natural resources and economic activity—such as forestry, fisheries, agriculture, mining, and oil and gas—without meaningful inclusion of First Nations as partners. This exclusion has denied First Nations with opportunities to thrive and contribute to the economic prosperity of this country.

Empowering First Nations as full economic partners unlocks a wealth of potential and innovation that will drive Canada's collective prosperity and economic growth. Guided by resolutions passed by First Nations-in-Assembly, the AFN has focused on key priorities this year:



Closing the Infrastructure Gap

Economic reconciliation cannot be achieved without addressing the critical infrastructure gaps that limit the potential of First Nations. Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 is essential for laying the foundation for sustainable economic growth. Access to clean water, safe housing, well-maintained roads, quality schools, and high-speed internet are fundamental to the well-being and prosperity of First Nations.

In April 2024, the AFN, in collaboration with Indigenous Services Canada, released the "Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030" report. This report estimates that an investment of \$349.2 billion is required over the next seven years to address critical infrastructure needs in First Nations communities. This includes \$135.1 billion for housing, \$5 billion for digital connectivity, and \$209.1 billion for other essential infrastructure such as schools, water plants, roads, ports, wharves, clinics, and more.

In November 2024, the AFN, in partnership with the Conference Board of Canada, released a follow-up report titled "Benefits for All Canadians: Economic Impact of Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030." This report highlights the substantial economic benefits of the proposed investment, projecting that it could generate \$635 billion in economic output over the next seven years. The report also indicates that such an investment would create approximately 340,000 jobs, with 90% of these positions anticipated to be filled by non-Indigenous people. Additionally, report anticipates that these investments could enhance Canada's annual GDP per capita growth standing within the G7 nations between 2023 and 2030.



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These reports highlight the critical need for immediate and substantial investment in First Nations infrastructure, not only to fulfill the federal government's commitment to Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 but also to create economic growth and job creation across Canada.

Loan Guarantee Program

In April, the federal government introduced a \$5 billion loan guarantee program to support First Nations' ownership in large-scale development projects. While this initiative represents a positive step forward, the scale of the program does not match the investments required.

Over the next decade, an estimated \$560 billion in major projects, primarily in the resource sector, are expected to take place on ancestral territories and lands of First Nations. These projects have the potential to generate trillions of dollars in economic benefits for Canada's economy for years to come.

To fully realize these opportunities and enable First Nations to create sustainable wealth on their territories, the AFN has proposed expanding the loan guarantee program to \$100 billion. This would position First Nations as true economic partners and leaders, while creating benefits for First Nations and for Canada for generations.



Procurement

We continue to challenge the federal government to strengthen and enforce standards for identifying First Nations entrepreneurs and businesses eligible for government and corporate procurement opportunities.

These non-enforced standards are damaging to First Nations and all Canadians, and not only undermines the integrity of Indigenous identities but also limits the economic opportunities available for legitimate First Nations members, businesses and organizations. Properly implemented procurement programs offer great potential to support emerging First

Nations economies and drive long-term growth. These programs must be protected and designed to ensure that benefits flow directly to First Nations.

It is the inherent right of First Nations to determine our membership. It's essential that the process of recognizing First Nations identity—whether by individuals, businesses, organizations, or those claiming or seeking to assert First Nations status—is led by First Nations to ensure legitimacy and validity.



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Fair, transparent, and open access to procurement opportunities from the Government of Canada, provincial governments, and the private sector is a key priority for First Nations and critical to our economic growth, self-determination, and community wellbeing. We continue to call on the Government of Canada to not only increase First Nations procurement opportunities, but to work in partnership with First Nations to ensure that the policies and practices surrounding First Nations identity and Indigenous business procurement are both respectful and reflective of First Nations rights and interests.

Education

We know the most effective way to sustain the success of a First Nations economy is to invest in education and skills training for our people. As the late Justice Murray Sinclair said, "Education has gotten us into this mess, and education will get us out."

The federal budget released in April 2024 allocated over \$1.2 billion over the next three years to improve K-12 schools and increase access to post-secondary education for First Nations students. While this investment is a positive step, it does not go far enough to address the impacts of generations of underfunding and neglect in First Nations education.

With Canada implementing significant immigration restrictions, universities and colleges face challenges from the potential loss of international students. This presents a unique opportunity: Why not prioritize filling these spaces with First Nations youth? Why not create pathways for First Nations children aging out of government care?





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Canada/USA Relations

As Canada navigates new challenges in its relationship with the United States, issues such as cross-border mobility rights, national defense, Arctic and coastal sovereignty, and economic growth all require the voices and perspectives of First Nations.

First Nations have long-standing rights to cross the Canada–U.S. border and engage in trade, as affirmed in Canada's Constitution, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and as protected under the Jay Treaty. These rights are key to preserving cultural, familial, economic, and social connections that have sustained our Nations for generations. Yet, First Nations continue to face barriers to border mobility and trade that disrupt families, livelihoods, and economic opportunities.

In November, the First Ministers met to discuss Canada–U.S. relations. During this meeting, we called on the Prime Minister and Premiers to include First Nations in these national discussions. Our inherent rights and unique experience on both sides of the border are essential to this dialogue. In this era of reconciliation, any strategy regarding the United States must actively involve First Nations.

Our lands and territories are central to Canada's wealth in critical minerals, energy resources and industries vital for prosperity and international trade. As stewards of these lands, First Nations bring valuable insight and knowledge critical to sustainable development, particularly in the Arctic and along Canada's coastlines.



Jay Treaty

In October, we welcomed new measures to improve cross-border mobility for First Nations whose families and Territories are divided by the Canada–U.S. border. These changes include extended visit times and the waiving of certain requirements for eligible First Nations to work or study in Canada. We acknowledge the important contributions of the Jay Treaty Border Alliance, whose efforts helped advance this progress.

While these changes are a positive step, First Nations' rights are still not fully upheld. For example, in the Mohawk Territory of Akwesasne, the community's unique position across multiple borders continues to pose significant challenges, including the ongoing requirement for passports and Enhanced Tribal Cards. These barriers must be addressed to ensure that First Nations' rights to mobility are fully respected.





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Community Building

Over the past few months, I've had the honour of being welcomed by Chiefs and communities across the country. Everywhere we travelled, the message was clear: it is time to empower First Nations families to care for our own children. It is time to put First Nations in charge, once and for all.

I thank the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) and Grand Chief Garrison Settee for their warm hospitality and for hosting dialogues on the Draft Agreement. Our meeting focused on important aspects of the proposed reforms, including the need to prevent children from being apprehended due to poverty—a concern highlighted by many Chiefs. I am grateful to all the Chiefs and community leaders for their participation and shared commitment to a better future for our children.

In Southern Manitoba, our discussions about the future of child and family services were valuable. I extend my thanks to Knowledge Keeper Emery Stagg for leading us in prayer and to the War Time Drum Group for their performance on September 16. I also acknowledge the contributions of Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Ovide Mercredi, Minister Nahanni Fontaine, and all the guest speakers and Chiefs who shared their perspectives.

Our visit to Fort McKay First Nation on August 2 was a significant event, marking the 125th Anniversary of the Signing of Treaty No. 8. The signing of Treaty No. 8 on June 21, 1899, marked a commitment to peace and friendship between the First Nations and the Crown. I thank Fort McKay First Nation Chief Raymond Powder and his council for welcoming me to their community for taking part in your celebrations and also dialoguing on Reform to First Nations Child and Family Services.

At the Indigenous Child Welfare Conference in Edmonton on September 16, I was honoured to spend time in Treaty No. 6 Territory. I deeply appreciate the hospitality of the Host Nation, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Chief Sheldon Sunshine, Treaty No. 8 Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi, and all other dignitaries. The conference was a vibrant forum for sharing ideas and goals to upload the rights and well-being of our children for future generations.

The full-day engagement session at Lac Beauport on the territory of the Huron-Wendat Nation was important, bringing together 10 Nations from across Quebec. I extend my special thanks to Elder Edith Picard for her prayers and to AFN Regional Chief Ghislain Picard for his leadership. Our discussions were valuable as we explored how the Draft Agreement supports the future and needs of our children in Quebec.





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On August 13, I had the privilege of visiting Millbrook First Nation in Nova Scotia. I extend my gratitude to their leadership for welcoming me into the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People, governed by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship. During our meeting, we engaged in dialogue and shared information on the Draft Agreement and how it can improve the well-being of our families and children across the Nova Scotia.

Throughout September, I had the opportunity to meet with the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Tsawassen Chiefs to discuss the Draft Agreement. While in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory, on the unceded ancestral lands of the Secwépemc Nation, I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Council of Chiefs. Special thanks to Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir, Tribal Chief, and BC AFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee, as well as the Chiefs who were present to discuss the Draft Agreement and its importance for our children and families. I also had the chance to meet with Chiefs, councillors, and representatives of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, including Rosalie Wilson-Yazzie, Councillor Donna Goodwater, Chief Byron Louis, Chief Greg Gabriel, Councillor Jordan Coble, Councillor Andrea Alexander, and Executive Director Pauline Terbasket.



During our engagement with Nicola Valley Nation Chiefs, councillors, and technicians at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, we carefully listened to their perspectives. These meetings allowed us to hear directly from the leadership about the needs and priorities of their communities. We also visited Kamloops, Kelowna and Vancouver, and held a presentation to the BCAFN Annual General Assembly on Oct. 8. Through unity and respect, we developed strong bonds that created lasting impacts and built upon the vision of our Nations, Chiefs and Elders who came before us. They wanted us to be in this together and recognized our voice is more powerful when we stand together to advance our shared goals and rights.

In August, I had the opportunity to visit Saskatoon in Treaty No. 6 territory to discuss the Draft Agreement. During our meeting, we heard important feedback about the need to ensure we build a system that will serve our children and families for generations to come and to support a future where our communities have greater control over services that truly reflect our values and priorities. I thank the Chiefs, technicians, and other attendees for their participation and sharing their perspectives and feedback on the Draft Agreement.

It was a privilege to make a virtual presentation to Treaty No. 4 Chiefs, who gathered in Qu' Appelle Valley on September 13. Thank you to everyone who attended for the successful engagement session.



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I acknowledge Regional Chief Kluane Adamek and the Yukon Chiefs for the invitation October 1 to discuss and deliberate on the Child Family Services Draft Agreement. Together we are finally starting to create a child welfare system in Canada that promotes prevention instead of rewarding the apprehension of First Nations children.

It was great to hear from Dene National Chief and Northwest Territories Regional Chief George Mackenzie on October 1. The AFN stands behind Dene Nation and we offer our support as the Nation moves towards reaching their own agreement. And I call on the Government of Canada to come to the table ready to work with our Nations in the Northwest Territories on this important reform.

Moving Forward

Over the past year, I have been honoured to visit First Nations communities across the country, hearing directly from our people about the priorities and challenges we face. While I have had the opportunity to visit most provinces, I look forward to travelling to the North and the Atlantic Coast in the coming year.

Throughout these visits, one thing remains clear: First Nations across Turtle Island continue to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and excellence. From managing multi-billion-dollar projects and achieving success in diverse fields such as politics, science, literature, and sports, First Nations are leading in every sector. We are making our mark in the economy, culture, climate advocacy, and human rights. As we look ahead to 2025, we will build on this momentum and focus on key milestones.

In 2025, we will pay tribute to late Justice Murray Sinclair by marking 10 years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its Calls to Action. This will be an opportunity to reflect on the progress made, hold governments accountable, and invite all Canadians to recommit to the journey of truth and reconciliation. We will also continue our efforts to return stolen artifacts, protect and uphold First Nations rights, and ensure governments act on their commitments.

The coming year will bring a federal election, where the voices and votes of First Nations will play an important role in shaping the future for the next generations. While there will be challenges, there will also be opportunities to advance our shared goals.

Through it all, we will stand together, just as our Elders and ancestors wanted. We are witnessing a shift in this country. Together, with unity and strength, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Meegwetch

*Cindy Woodhouse, National Chief
Assembly of First Nations*

REGIONAL CHIEFS' REPORTS





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Regional Chief Andrea Paul, Nova Scotia



Pjilata'q! I am proud to be able to provide this report to you on behalf of the Mi'kmaq Chiefs of Nova Scotia.

Introduction:

Welcome Knowledge Keepers, Chiefs, Councillors, Youth, Veterans, Assembly of First Nations (AFN) staff, and friends. I am honoured to present my report to you with the highlights of the past six months.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

The Senator Tour, led by Senator Paul (PJ) Prosper concluded in June 2024. On October 1, 2024, Senator Prosper released his report titled, "**ReconciliACTION.**" This report aligns with national priorities and highlights the importance of working together to create a brighter future for our people. Key issues addressed include:

- Governance
- Health and Social Issues
- Economic Development, Lands, and Resources
- Justice
- Citizenship
- Language, Culture, and History

In August, I attended a Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture meeting in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (PEI). This Indigenous-Federal-Provincial-Territorial meeting was also attended by various Ministers from across the nation. Attending on behalf of the AFN, the meeting was an opportunity to advance First Nation priorities based on the mandates provided by First Nations-in-Assembly. It was crucial to emphasize that First Nations must not be treated as a checkmark or an afterthought but as part of planning, agenda-setting, and decision-making processes that affect our communities.

In September, I participated in the Sixth Convening of the Trilateral Working Group (TWG) meeting between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The theme of the meeting was addressing gender-based violence through the lens of self-determination. A significant part of this discussion focused on improving international cross-jurisdictional communication among Mexico, Canada, and the United States when First Nations women and girls go missing.

In October, I attended the AFN's 3rd National Climate Gathering, "*Catalyzing First Nations Climate and Conservation Leadership for Transformative Change,*" in Calgary, Alberta, and spoke on a panel titled, "*Sharing Examples of First Nations and Climate Conservation Solutions.*" Additionally, I participated in the Atlantic Policy Congress Climate Leadership Conference in Charlottetown, PEI, speaking on the panel



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Regional Chief Andrea Paul, Nova Scotia

“Women and Climate Change.” In the same month, the Regional Chief Office hosted its first Women Leaders Retreat, organized by Annie Daisey, WAGE Coordinator. The retreat was well attended and received positive feedback. We hope to follow up with another Women Leaders Retreat in the new year.

In November, I joined a delegation from my region to travel to Flanders Fields in Belgium to commemorate Fallen Indigenous Service Members and Veterans. The group also participated in the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate.

National Portfolio #1 – Health

The AFN continues to support Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Navigators while working with the Joint Steering Committee (JRSC) to improve the NIHB program. The goal is to ensure the program better meets the needs of First Nations and reflects changes in healthcare systems.

Efforts to address the intersection of mental wellness and homelessness led to the National First Nations Homelessness and Mental Wellness Forum on November 13-14, 2024, in Vancouver, British Columbia (B.C.), on the traditional territories of the $x^w m \theta k^w \acute{y} \acute{o} m$ (Musqueam), $S k w x w \acute{u} 7 m e s h$ (Squamish), and $s \acute{a} i l i w \acute{e} t \acute{a} \acute{t}$ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The forum served as a platform to share insights, strategies, and develop comprehensive solutions. It also featured plenary sessions, interactive dialogues, and workshops aimed at promoting wholistic and culturally informed policy approaches. Moving forward, the AFN will continue to advocate for supports to address the devastating effects of the opioid crisis in communities.

The AFN’s recommendations for a Wholistic Long-Term and Continuing Care Framework were submitted to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). This framework serves as an important document to inform the development of a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) toward improving the Assisted Living Program and the First Nations and Inuit Home and Community Care Program. The MC is expected to be submitted later this year, providing a comprehensive vision for enhancing care services.

On Accessibility, the AFN continues to highlight the importance of First Nations’ rights, especially in ensuring that government and public spaces are accessible to individuals with different abilities, further pushing for national standards and responsibilities to ensure inclusion and equity in all environments.

Looking ahead, the AFN will release the final discussion report on the Seven Generations Continuum of Care. This \ document will emphasize the Two-Eyed Seeing approach to healthcare, advocating for a wholistic model that integrates both Western and traditional practices for optimal wellness. The AFN also plans to host a National Forum on Health to bring attention to the current challenges and successes in First Nations healthcare and to explore new ways to improve outcomes.



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Regional Chief Andrea Paul, Nova Scotia

National Portfolio #2 – Languages

First Nations languages are at a critical moment and require support to thrive. Despite this, the Department of Canadian Heritage has over seen a reduction in funding for First Nations language of over \$20 million. The AFN continues advocating directly to ministers for a renewal of funding to pre-2023 levels. In addition to this work, the Chiefs Committee on Languages (CCOL) and Technical Committee on Languages (TCOL), developed an interim funding formula as supported by AFN Resolution 19/2024, *First Nations Languages Regional Allocation Formula*. This formula represents a compromise between regions and reflects the committees' ability to overcome barriers imposed by the federal government. As part of this resolution, we have begun drafting a formal complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages regarding the chronic underfunding of First Nations Languages.

In November, the TCOL recently undertook strategic planning to chart a course for the next two years in preparation of the expiry of the interim funding. As part of this work, the AFN has contracted a researcher to investigate and collect data source to support data driven decision making.

The AFN continues to participate on the Joint Implementation Steering Committee (JISC) for the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act (ILA). This committee oversees the implementation of the ILA. Currently, the JISC is preparing for the first five-year independent review of the ILA. The AFN has been advocating for a reviewer structure that ensures First Nations voices are respected. In addition to this work, the sector is preparing advocacy for the three-year parliamentary review of the ILA.

National Portfolio #3 – Fisheries

In February 2024, I joined my colleague, Regional Chief Terry Teegee, on the National Fisheries Committee (NFC) as Co-Chair representing the East Coast. I chaired my first NFC meeting in Ottawa in March 2024. The NFC has a broad mandate, including the protection of inland fisheries, fish and their habitats, the Oceans Protection Plan, and aquaculture, among other priorities.

As part of the NFC's advocacy strategy, we invited updates from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to provide information and share their workplans regarding the Action Plan Measures for which DFO is the lead. In particular, we heard from Conservation and Protection on the East Coast about their proposed changes to relationships with First Nation fish harvesters, particularly concerning the ongoing combative management of lobster and elver fisheries, which are among several high-profile fisheries.

Despite assurances of progress, much more remains to be done. Structural racism continues to be an ongoing topic of discussion within the NFC as we develop strategies and implement activities to address it constructively. One such strategy is public outreach and education. For example, the NFC hosted a Dialogue Session in Montreal on July 8, focusing on the elver fisheries and their enforcement. This session provided an opportunity for fish harvesters to speak directly to the Assistant Deputy Minister for the Maritimes Region.



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Regional Chief Andrea Paul, Nova Scotia

Addressing racism was also a key message in my presentation at the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers (CCFAM) meeting in August 2024 in Prince Edward Island. This Indigenous-Federal-Provincial-Territorial meeting provided an important platform to meet directly with Ministers and share concerns. In my presentation, I emphasized the need for the full implementation of the Marshall decision and reminded the CCFAM of the AFN's mandate and current strategic priorities.

Path Ahead:

The Nova Scotia Regional Chief's Office is looking forward to continuing the work outlined in the "**ReconciliACTION**" Report, addressing critical issues for the region. Our leadership continues to work tirelessly toward forging a better path forward through efforts in environmental stewardship, clean energy projects, economic development, housing and homelessness, mental wellness and addiction, and addressing systemic racism. Every day, we witness their dedication to building a better tomorrow.

Conclusion:

I want to acknowledge and thank all levels of leadership for coming together this week as we work to advance, advocate for, and strengthen our communities with unity and clarity.

Wishing you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

Wela'lioq emsit.

In peace and friendship,

Nova Scotia Regional Chief Andrea Paul



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Regional Chief Brendan Mitchell, Newfoundland



I wish to thank Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, AFN Legal Counsel, AFN staff, and other partners for their efforts leading up to the Special Chiefs Assembly (SCA) on the Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) in October 2024, held in Calgary. Despite the outcome of the vote, we will continue to move forward in support of our children.

Introduction:

The Office of the Newfoundland Regional Chief has been established in Conne River at Miawpukek First Nation and in Corner Brook, Newfoundland for several months. This has allowed our region to better participate in the objectives and mandate of the AFN, in support of the AFN and our region. To date, the regional office has hired six employees, five of whom are funded through one-year grants provided by the AFN. Work is ongoing for coordinator positions related to women's initiatives, United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA), climate change, water, and nature. The Office of the Regional Chief continues to participate in all meetings of the AFN Executive Committee and related activities.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

The Office of the Regional Chief was involved in planning and coordination of Women's Initiatives Conference, held on October 4-6, 2024, in Deer Lake, Newfoundland. Seventy women from across Newfoundland attended. The event was a success and achieved its goal, with Senator Judy White as keynote speaker and Federal Minister Gudie Hutchings and Provincial Minister of Indigenous Affairs Scott Reid in attendance.

The work of the UNDA coordinator is ongoing. In November, a meeting was held with the Provincial Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation and Newfoundland's Premier. The region of Newfoundland will be encouraged to adopt United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Several community visits also took place in November.

In October, the Newfoundland Region sent ten delegates to a climate change conference in Calgary. Additionally, the Regional Chief participated in the Joint Committee on Climate Action in St. John's from August 27-29, 2024.

In July 2024, the Newfoundland Regional Chief attended the AFN Annual General Assembly in Montreal and represented the AFN and National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak at Canada's Premiers meeting in Halifax. Earlier in the summer, the Regional Chief represented the AFN and Chief Nepinak in France for



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the repatriation of the remains of Newfoundland's Unknown Soldier and attended the final repatriation event in St. John's on Canada Day. In October, the Regional Chief also represented the region at the unveiling ceremonies for statues honoring the Beothuk People, held in Botwood and St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Newfoundland Regional Chief also attended all scheduled Executive Committee and Management Committee meetings, as well as Atlantic Policy Congress meetings on April 12, May 17, July 5, September 6, and 25, 2024. Over the summer, the Regional Chief participated in four powwows in Newfoundland and attended the Atlantic First Nations housing and infrastructure meeting on May 29, 2024. Additionally, the Regional Chief chaired the hiring committee for the recruitment of a new AFN CEO. Key issues for the region continue to be the housing shortage, the need for economic development, and controversies surrounding projects in the wind, energy, and mining sectors.

National Portfolio #1 – AFN Management Committee

Current members include Regional Chief Brendan Mitchell, Newfoundland, (Chair), Regional Chief Abram Benedict, Ontario, Regional Chief Willie Moore, Manitoba, Regional Chief Joanna Bernard, New Brunswick and Regional Chief Andrea Paul, Nova Scotia.

The Management Committee held its regular meetings on April 24, May 30, June 7, June 26, July 31, August 5 and September 25. The Management Committee was tasked as the Hiring Committee to recruit a full-time CEO for the AFN. We congratulate Andrew Bisson for accepting this position and wish him success in his new full-time role. The Management Committee continues to meet monthly to address administrative and operational issues and opportunities at the AFN.

National Portfolio #2– Housing and Infrastructure

The Chiefs Committee on Housing and Infrastructure continues to advance First Nations-in-Assembly resolutions related to housing, infrastructure, homelessness, and clean drinking water initiatives. At the AFN Annual General Assembly in July 2024, First Nations-in-Assembly passed Resolutions 43/2024, *First Nations Clean Water Act*, 44/2024, *Support for First Nations-led responses to Chronic and Unsheltered Homelessness*, 45/2024, *Transition of the First Nations Market Housing Fund to First Nations Control*, and 46/2024, *Remote Airport Infrastructure Funding for Required Upgrades* and 59/2024, *Political Support for First Nations in Saskatchewan*.

Building on these resolutions, we continue to advocate for \$349.2 billion to close the infrastructure gap and are further advancing the National First Nations Homelessness Action Plan, approved by the Assembly in December 2023. The Action Plan is aimed at supporting First Nations control over holistic and culturally safe housing services so citizens can access supportive housing, no matter where they live. A recent Homelessness and Mental Wellness Forum in Vancouver brought together leaders, policymakers, and practitioners to discuss best practices in supporting First Nations self-determination in housing, mental wellness, and homelessness initiatives.



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Additionally, the AFN submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on Bill C-61, *An Act respecting water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure*. Looking ahead, the AFN will host the National Housing and Infrastructure Conference from February 19–21, 2024, in Calgary under the theme “Mind the Gap: Advancing First Nations Housing, Infrastructure, and Drinking Water.” We look forward to seeing everyone there.

Path Ahead:

The Newfoundland Region will be participating in the upcoming Special Chiefs Assembly scheduled for December 3-5 in Ottawa, Ontario, and the AFN National First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Conference in Calgary, Alberta, on February 19–21, 2024. The Regional Office will continue overseeing ongoing work funded by grants related to women’s initiatives, the UNDA, climate change, water, and nature with work planned for the remainder of 2024 and into 2025. Our region will continue to support initiatives related to the Draft Agreement on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services and will support the AFN and National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak in these efforts.

Conclusion:

The Office of the Newfoundland Regional Chief is now well-established and employs a full-time Executive Assistant and an additional five employees engaged in work funded by one-year grants provided by the AFN. This office will continue to work positively in support of the AFN Executive Committee and Reconciliation initiatives.

Wishing everyone an enjoyable and safe winter season.



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Regional Chief Joanna Bernard - New Brunswick Region



Kwey/Qey, I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe People. The Algonquin peoples have lived on this land since time immemorial. We are grateful to have the opportunity to be present in this territory.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

First, I'd like to thank the New Brunswick Chiefs for trusting in me to represent you as your Regional Chief for the next three years. I am honoured, privileged, and humbled to be a leader of one of the most beautiful Turtle Island regions. I do not take this responsibility lightly, and I will endeavour to represent you with the utmost transparency, fairness, and boldness. I am always open to new perspectives regarding the governance of this region, and I welcome each of you to reach out to me when you want to discuss an issue.

I want all Chiefs to know that I will continue to:

- Protect and advance the rights and interests of First Nations.
- Preserve, promote, and protect First Nations cultures and traditions.
- Develop policies and identify resources to enhance the economic, social, and cultural well-being of our First Nations.
- Work collaboratively with regional, national, and international organizations to support and advance the collective interests of our region.
- Prioritize and move forward issues related to climate, nature, and safe drinking water.

I look forward to engaging with you and hearing your thoughts and ideas over the next three days. Together, let us continue to move forward in unity.

The primary focus this fiscal period has been on Bill C-61, *An Act Respecting Water, Source Water, Wastewater and Related Infrastructure on First Nation Lands*. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) New Brunswick organized and facilitated two engagement sessions focused on Bill C-61 and water-related projects in the region, with findings reported to the AFN. A third session is planned for winter 2025.

In New Brunswick, technicians have consistently reported significant capacity challenges for those working directly on water infrastructure projects. Consultants are at capacity, leading to inflated fees and project budgets. These costs detract from actual work on First Nations projects. Government funding is often tied up in overhead and feasibility studies that are not required, and they are losing sight of the goal: safe water for all. With growing residential and commercial developments, succession planning to



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In September 2024, the NBAFN supported the 3rd Annual Indigenous-Led Energy Symposium, hosted by North Shore Mi'kmaq District Council in Fredericton, N.B. The Symposium brought together Indigenous leaders, organizations, private sector players, utilities, financial agencies, and government representatives from Atlantic Canada to advance Indigenous leadership and participation in the energy sector. This year's event highlighted Indigenous-led projects shaping the energy landscape in Atlantic Canada and explored emerging opportunities on the horizon.

The NBAFN 1st Annual Nature Gathering was held on April 23, 2024, at the Maqiyahimok Centre in St. Mary's First Nation. The event, themed '*Exploring Biodiversity through an Indigenous Lens*,' brought together leaders, experts, and community members to discuss and share knowledge on biodiversity and environmental stewardship. The gathering aimed to highlight the critical role of Indigenous perspectives in biodiversity conservation and to foster collaborative efforts for sustainable environmental practices. The agenda included a variety of sessions focusing on biodiversity and environmental stewardship. The event began with a hot breakfast buffet, followed by an opening prayer, and comments from key leaders. The morning sessions covered the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and species at risk in the N.B. region. After a lunch break, the afternoon sessions featured project showcases by New Brunswick First Nations, a wrap-up discussion, and a closing prayer.

National Portfolio #1 – Economic Development

The AFN continues to support First Nations, Indigenous Skills, Employment, and Training Program agreement holders by focusing on engagement, partnerships, labor market data, and Employment and Social Development Canada policy issues. Additionally, efforts are underway to enhance First Nations participation in decision-making regarding Natural Resources Canada's programs and policies. To further these objectives, the AFN will host a Natural Resource Forum in March 2025 to address priorities like regulatory coordination, partnerships, and economic policy development.

Expanding trade opportunities for First Nations remains a key focus. The AFN is working to include Indigenous-specific provisions in agreements like the Central Bank Network for Indigenous Inclusion, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement. The AFN is also advocating for the Government of Canada to implement recommendations from the Expert Panel on the Cannabis Act to better support First Nations participation in the cannabis sector.

Additionally, the AFN is monitoring Bill S-268, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and the Indian Act, which seeks to affirm First Nations jurisdiction over gaming. As part of its advocacy, the AFN is preparing a legal analysis on the bill.



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Regional Chief Joanna Bernard - New Brunswick Region

Path Ahead:

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Rosalie Labillois, for her service as the New Brunswick and AFN National Youth Council Representative. Your commitment to advocating for the voices of First Nations youth has made a significant impact regionally and nationally. Your passion and dedication have not only inspired those around you, but you have also paved the way for meaningful change. Thank you for your hard work, resilience and the positive influence you brought to our youth and first nation communities at large!

*Woliwon/Wela'lin,
Regional Chief Joanna Bernard*



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Regional Chief Wendell LaBobe, PEI Office of the Regional Chief Inc.



Greetings to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chiefs, AFN Executive Committee, Knowledge Keepers, Women's Council, Youth Council, Veterans Council, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ Council. I respectfully extend my greetings from the Prince Edward Island (PEI) Office of the Regional Chief.

Introduction:

As Regional Chief of PEI, it is my role to represent and advocate on the interests of the PEI region, as well as support the AFN resolutions. I look to our leadership for their input and direction. Since my inauguration in May 2024, I have been busy with numerous event invitations, both formal and informal. It has been invigorating and a great learning while staying on top of current issues and sitting with the AFN Executive Committee. I am grateful to the AFN and the Regional Chiefs for their support since my start.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

Since joining the AFN Executive in May 2024, I am impressed to see the magnitude of work within each sector, while teams manage their work plans and implement the resolutions put forth from the assembly. The AFN deserve a grand applause! I want to express my sincere appreciation to the Justice Sector and the support provided to me on the MMIWG and 2S+ Portfolio.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Andrew Bisson on his recent hire as the AFN Chief Executive Officer. While not new to AFN, he will bring vast experience working with AFN to support the AFN Executive Committee. I look forward to working with him in his new position.

In July 2024, I attended my first AFN Annual General Assembly (AGA), where I met with fellow AFN Regional Chiefs, staff and National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak. Overall, my first AGA was very educational and informative and enjoyed the overall experience. It gave me a deeper understanding of our roles as Regional Chiefs and AFN in general. I look forward to continuing working with my fellow colleagues on important matters.

In October 2024, I participated in the AFN third National Climate Gathering in Calgary, Alberta, along with several PEI delegates. It was motivating to see the many excellent presentations along with the opportunity to network with other regions. I also attended the Atlantic Policy Congress's (APC) First Atlantic First Nation Climate Leadership and Action Conference where climate leaders, community members, industry leaders, and government gathered to share relevant matters related to the climate action and connect with one another.



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The most recent event, the Special Chiefs Assembly held in Calgary, brought together Chiefs and proxies in-person and online to discuss and vote on the Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Program. This three-day assembly provided a forum for discussion on the Draft Agreement, where attendees could voice their perspectives on both the positive and negative aspects. Ultimately, the agreement was voted down. Moving forward, AFN and the AFN Executive Committee will work to address the new resolutions passed by Chiefs and proxies, refining the agreement to better align with their expectations and priorities. Prior to the Special Chiefs Assembly, each Regional Office set up engagement sessions with their respected Chiefs of their region to ensure their feedback was provided on the agreement.

In the summer of 2024, the PEI Regional Office hired a Climate Mentor and two Engagement Officers to work together in engaging the Mi'kmaq of Prince Edward Island. Their mission is to gather insights and ideas on climate issues, with the goal of developing a climate strategy tailored for the PEI Mi'kmaq. This strategy aims to build on past efforts, identify new pathways, and propose actionable steps to address climate change. Engagement sessions, both on- and off-reserve, are set to begin across Prince Edward Island in November.

National Portfolio #1 – Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

Since starting with the AFN, I have been focused on deepening my understanding of the MMIWG portfolio by reviewing the progress made thus far. To move forward, in collaborations with the justice sector we plan to meet with federal and provincial governments to receive updates on completed and ongoing actions and to identify further steps to ensure that MMIWG2S+ receives the urgent attention it deserves.

On July 10, 2024, during the AFN AGA, I was invited to join the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, National Chief Woodhouse Nepinak, and the Harris family to be present at a press conference held at the Le Westin Hotel as MMIWG portfolio holder. The purpose of the press conference was to respond to the verdict in the trial seeking justice for Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, and Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe (Buffalo Woman). After the press conference, I introduced myself to the families and expressed my support.

On October 4, 2024, I participated in the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI's Annual Vigil Walk in Summerside, PEI. This year's event was in honour of Leona Newkinga Simon where everyone wore red and walked to remember her and to stand to raise awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit individuals (MMIWG2S+).

The PEI Office of the Regional Chief will continue to advocate for meaningful implementation of the 231 Calls to Action. A priority is to push for the implementation of the 231 Calls to Action from the National Inquiry, many of which remain unfulfilled. As Regional Chief, I aim to host a conference dedicated to the MMIWG2S+ portfolio. This event will review what work has been achieved and outline the essential actions that still need to be addressed.



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Regional Chief Wendell LaBobe, PEI Office of the Regional Chief Inc.

Path Ahead:

I look forward to our continued and collaborative dialogue on all matters and priorities. The PEI Regional Office will continue to support the First Nations in the important work to advance First Nations across Turtle Island. Thank you to our leadership as we navigate through the many challenges we face today and in the future.

As the PEI Regional Chief, I look forward to working with you in areas such as:

- Strengthening government relations to advance initiatives like the MMIWG2S+, climate resilience and child and family welfare reform.
- Advancing Indigenous-led climate initiative discussions that will prioritize Indigenous knowledge and community-led solutions.
- Addressing Child and Family Services by engaging the ongoing FNCFS reform discussions and shaping agreements that help ensure they reflect the needs and values of First Nations.
- Capacity building for youth and leaders by focusing on education, leadership training, and youth mentorship that will empower the next generation and sustain growth in Indigenous governance and economic development.
- Community engagement by hosting conferences, workshops or regional gatherings that will help elevate the voices and priorities of the Indigenous communities and foster collaboration across Turtle Island.

Conclusion:

Lastly, and again, I want to express my congratulations to Andrew Bisson on his recent hire as the new Chief Executive Officer. I look forward to working him in his new position.

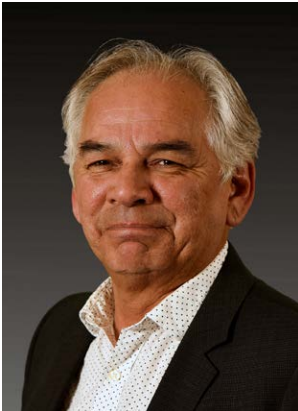
*Wela'lioq, Thank you
Regional Chief Wendell LaBobe*



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Regional Chief Picard, Quebec-Labrador



The Grand Chiefs and Chiefs, gathered by the Assembly of First Nations Quebec Labrador (AFNQL), along their Councils and the entire First Nations population of our territories, acknowledge the leaders of our Nations. Together, we face numerous challenges critical to the development of our Nations, the respect of our rights by colonial governments, and the implementation of our self-determination. The AFNQL is fully committed to addressing these issues.

Introduction:

The well-being of our population and the respect for traditional and Treaty rights continues to drive and unite the AFNQL. For the Chiefs of our Nations, among our concerns are the support services for those most precious to us—our children.

On the one hand, justice has finally been rendered to our children by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling, on the other hand, numerous obstacles in the implementation of this historic ruling risk compromising its long-awaited beneficial impacts. The AFNQL has prioritized addressing these challenges and remains open to collaboration that helps correct the intolerable situation affecting our children and family services. More than ever, respectful and meaningful relationships between First Nations governments and colonial federal and provincial governments are essential to meet the needs of First Nations and close the development gaps that persist.

With the federal government in its final stretch of functionality, a parliament paralyzed by partisan issues, and a provincial government that continues to deploy every available means to deny the existence of First Nations rights and the legitimacy of their governments, intergovernmental relations are increasingly becoming an issue on which AFNQL Chiefs must focus their efforts.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

First, I'd like to express our pride following the adoption of our Declaration on First Nations Rights to Traditional Languages in September. This Declaration was adopted during an important and historic forum on traditional languages held last September by the AFNQL Chiefs.

In August, during a gathering hosted by the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam Council, several critical issues for our Nations were addressed. The Assembly also celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Innu Nikamu Festival, a major event celebrating our cultures.

Despite ongoing unproductive relations with Premier Legault's provincial government, the AFNQL persists in asserting First Nations rights and expectations through demands and pressure tactics. Most of the provincial government initiatives—including legislative, regulatory, and political—are likely to impact the First Nations population, their territories, and socio-economic conditions.



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On energy development, the AFNQL, supported by a Chiefs Committee dedicated to energy issues and technical assistance from FNQLSDI and FNQLEDC, intervened both in the public arena and before provincial parliamentary bodies by submitting a political opinion as part of the study of Bill 69. Additionally, the AFNQL actively engaged with Hydro-Québec in adopting a reconciliation plan with First Nations. This plan, developed with the involvement of the AFNQL, was presented to the Chiefs during the November 2024 Assembly, following multiple meetings between the Crown corporation's CEO and First Nations representatives.

The provincial government, despite repeated warnings and reminders from the AFNQL, persists in its intention to pass legislation on securitization and another on First Nations languages. The first piece of legislation pertains to actions the province must take to adapt services provided to the First Nations within institutions under its jurisdiction. This is an inescapable and essential responsibility, was emphasized by the Viens Commission, which the province itself established.

From the AFNQL's perspective, the provincial government's ongoing denial of systemic discrimination undermines the credibility of its efforts related to cultural security. Similarly, the proposed provincial legislation on First Nations languages lacks justification, according to the AFNQL and the Chief who brought this issue before the Assembly. Addressing this matter has required numerous political interventions by the AFNQL. The inability and illegitimacy of a provincial government legislating on First Nations traditional languages, an area clearly beyond its jurisdiction, no longer needs to be demonstrated. While the province's support for traditional languages, in various forms, has been valuable, and collaboration between the province and First Nations authorities is desirable, this in no way justifies the need for provincial legislation.

In both instances, the provincial government appears more focused on assuming a legislative role that rightfully belongs first and foremost to First Nations governments—a role the province persistently refuses to recognize, thereby usurping First Nations authority.

This attitude, marked by the same refusal to recognize First Nations' legislative and governmental capacities and a determination to impose its powers, is evident across all provincial government actions. This significantly compromises the AFNQL's efforts of collaboration and engagement in response to provincial initiatives.

Examples of this include bills regarding the appointment of a commissioner for children's rights, the improvised creation of a museum of Quebec's national history, a history that begins with the arrival of Europeans focusing on the "Doctrine of Discovery"), legislation on mining development that disregards First Nations rights except that of "consultation," and an upcoming forestry development bill built on the same colonial model. The AFNQL continues to denounce and counter the attitude of the current provincial government with direct involvement from Chiefs and support from regional commissions and organizations accountable to them. These efforts and energy will bring better results if it becomes



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possible to establish a respectful intergovernmental relationship with the province of Quebec, a situation that remains far from the case currently, despite the jovial assertions by the provincial minister responsible for First Nations relations.

The AFNQL shares the same objective of developing a respectful and productive intergovernmental relationship with the federal government. However, this relationship exists in a different context, one that also presents the AFNQL with significant challenges. The AFNQL is focusing its efforts on urging the Trudeau government, now in a minority context, to fulfill its commitments after nine years in power. These commitments, made under the banner of reconciliation, include addressing the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, where implementation has been far from satisfactory, as well as commitments related to the UNDRIP. Specifically, these commitments involve the Act and Action Plan adopted to implement the UNDRIP into all federal legislation. Faced with obligations under its own Species-at-Risk Act, the federal government finds itself at the center of a conundrum, largely created and maintained by partisan politics. On the one hand, the federal Conservative party, as the official opposition, and on the other, the Legault government, have chosen to politicize the safeguarding of an endangered species. This issue has become tainted with partisanship, if not outright demagoguery.

National Portfolio #1

Justice and Public Safety

At the national level, the AFNQL Regional Chief Picard shares the Justice and Public Safety portfolio with British Columbia Regional Chief Terry Teegee.

With regard to Public Safety, and specifically First Nations policing, the issue of First Nations self-determination versus provincial/territorial jurisdiction has been at the forefront of discussions and will undoubtedly remain a central focus in the months ahead.

In a recent letter to the National Chief, the federal Minister of Public Safety, Dominic LeBlanc, provided long-awaited clarification on the proposed bill recognizing First Nations policing as an essential service. In his letter, the Minister LeBlanc outlined that the bill would reaffirm the predominant jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. The National Chief's response and her objections on the grounds of First Nations self-determination set the tone for future discussions. These discussions will require significant commitment from the two Regional Chiefs responsible for this critical national portfolio.

As for the Justice Sector, the established committees continue their work in alignment with the resolutions and mandates entrusted to them.



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Regional Chief Abram Benedict, Ontario Region



Shé:kon to all leadership. I want to welcome leaders from coast to coast to coast to the 2024 Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Special Chiefs Assembly. I extend holiday greetings and best wishes as we head into 2025 and continuing working for the betterment of all our Nations and communities.

Introduction:

In June, I was elected as the Ontario Regional Chief at the Chiefs of Ontario's 49th Annual Chiefs Assembly, becoming the first Haudenosaunee to hold the office. My platform was rooted in the importance of building relationships with the federal and provincial governments while advocating for First Nations sovereignty. Having previously served as Grand Chief of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne for nine years, I look forward to serving each of the 133 Chiefs in the region as we work together to ensure our Nations not only survive but thrive as well.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

The Ontario region has been very active over the last six months, particularly on the social file and advancing work on the Final Settlement Agreement on Child Welfare. While the national vote did not pass, Ontario will continue striving to improve the lives of all our children in the region, especially those in the child welfare system. Ontario is preparing for the Indigenous Health Equity Fund and how the region can most benefit. As in any other region, when funding is part of the discussions, the conversation can be lengthy and challenging.

In education, Ontario is continuing to advocate to ensure curriculums in the school system accurately reflects First Nations history. We also continue to advocate for advancements in languages and increased opportunities within communities, as this is a priority for the region.

At the AFN Annual General Assembly (AGA) in Montreal, Quebec, the Ontario region welcomed the support from the First Nations-in-Assembly to stop the Government of Canada's discriminatory treatment of First Nations in the current carbon pricing regime. The carbon charge disproportionately impacts First Nations than others and cannot incentivize them switching to greener energy options. This is due to the fact that for many, no such choices are available. First Nations in Ontario are seeking fair treatment that acknowledges First Nations' unique jurisdictional status in Canada, protects the environment, and recognizes the special circumstances due to centuries of colonialism. The carbon tax is designed to change behaviour and push people to use greener energy sources and transportation. But many green options—such as electric cars or heat pumps—are impossible for First Nations in Ontario due to the historic lack of infrastructure investment by Canada and the ongoing socio-economic burden of



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Regional Chief Abram Benedict, Ontario Region

colonialism. The Chiefs of Ontario filed demands that stipulate Canada either figure out a way to make the carbon tax fair to First Nations or exempt First Nations from the tax entirely. We also call for equitable disbursement of the carbon tax rebate and alternative methods of disbursement other than through the Canada Revenue Agency. First Nations are the original Peoples of this land, and we have consistently supported initiatives aimed at protecting the biodiversity, lands and waters we have lived on since time immemorial. Yet, we are among the most affected by climate change in Canada.

Our Justice Sector has very busy the last few months, from working on Bill C-53, to the pending release of the Special Interlocutor Report. In September, it was made aware that Métis Nation–Saskatchewan (MN-S) withdrew from the Métis National Council, further distancing themselves from the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). As we know, the MNO's claims have not stood up to scrutiny, and we are now seeing the repercussions. It is encouraging to see that others are taking notice of what First Nations in Ontario and legitimate Métis Nations have been saying for years. The MNO is getting away with unfounded claims in First Nations Ancestral and Treaty territories in Ontario for far too long. As a background, the Chiefs of Ontario has opposed the MNO for over 15 years. The Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) left the national council in 2021 because the MNO continued to have a seat at the table. Now the MN-S has done the same. The Chiefs of Ontario applauds the tireless advocacy that First Nations Chiefs in Ontario have done to educate their communities and the broader public about the dangers of false identity claims.

“We have much work to do, and I plan to embrace the Chiefs of Ontario office as we move forward in our advocacy efforts with the governments of Ontario and Canada.”

Another accomplishment in the region was the advocacy and support for the funding related to the Indian Residential Schools. In late July, First Nations and Survivors were informed of an 86% funding reduction, capping funding for organizations and community leaders searching for missing children and unmarked burials at former residential school sites at \$500,000 per year, down from \$3 million. The cuts also made many important activities, including archeology, commemoration, and memorialization efforts, ineligible for funding.

Following widespread opposition from First Nations, Survivors, and other organizations across the country in late August, the federal government reversed this policy. Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Gary Anandasangaree, stated concerns voiced by First Nations were heard “loud and clear” and the cuts were a “mistake.”



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Regional Chief Abram Benedict, Ontario Region

National Portfolio #1

As part of the AFN Executive Committee, I hold three portfolios: Land, Territorial and Resources (LTR), Clean Drinking Water and the Management Committee.

The primary focus of the Chiefs Committee of LTR (CCoLTR) are Specific Claims and Additions to Reserve (ATR).

Currently, specific claims reform is a key, shared priority that plays a critical role in advancing reconciliation and supporting First Nations prosperity. Further, the Government of Canada has committed on numerous occasions to the establishment of an Independent Centre for the Resolution of Specific Claims (the Independent Centre). Since March 2024, the AFN-Canada Specific Claims Implementation Working Group (SCIWG) has continued its efforts to establish a joint proposal for the Independent Centre. Despite these efforts, we remain concerned about the Government of Canada's commitment to develop legislation to establish the Independent Centre. We also are concerned that little progress has been made to address the significant divergences between the AFN and Canada at the SCIWG.

National Portfolio #2

In addition to the Executive Portfolios, the Chiefs of Ontario were party to Final Settlement Agreement and have been very active in negotiations. Despite the result of the vote, the Ontario region will continue to fight for on-reserve children facing systemic discrimination through First Nations Child and Family Services Program. Both the Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation have passed resolutions supporting the Draft Final Settlement Agreement during regional Special Chiefs Assemblies.

Path Ahead:

Lastly, as a member of the AFN Management Committee, I support work to ensure activities carried out are consistent with the finance policies, authorities, and guidelines as established by the AFN Executive Committee. We monitor and report on the financial status of the AFN and provide financial recommendations in the best interests of the AFN.

Conclusion:

Thank you to my colleagues on the AFN Executive Committee, the Chiefs of Ontario Leadership Council, all the staff at the AFN and Chiefs of Ontario, and the community leadership and staff for their continued support in our work.

Nia:wen ko:wa and Miigwech to all the leadership for your ongoing efforts and important work.



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Regional Chief Willie Moore, Manitoba Region



Greetings to all the Leadership, Knowledge Keepers, and First Nations citizens. The tireless work you do is valuable and appreciated. I look forward to engaging with each of you during this Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Special Chiefs Assembly.

Introduction:

Tansi, I am honoured to introduce myself as the Manitoba Regional Chief. I represent the collective voice of 63 First Nations in Manitoba, working to promote and protect the inherent rights, interests, and well-being of our citizens. As Regional Chief, my mandate is to advocate for self-determination, reconciliation, and nation-to-nation building.

I acknowledge the traditional territories on which we gather and pay respects to the Knowledge Keepers and ancestors who guide our work.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

It has been a difficult time of mourning for our region as we lost our Matriarch, the late Grand Chief Cathy Merrick. She left us suddenly and the huge void still sits in each of our hearts. Still in our grief, we continue to do work she would have wanted us to do and that is to continue the fight to address the critical issues for our region. We will always remember her unwavering dedication to our people, her words, and her wisdom.

Working in unity with other political organizations in our region is vital for the betterment of our First Nations. Our organizations meet quarterly to enhance the well-being of our communities and citizens. Collaborative efforts like these are crucial for fostering positive change. Together, we share ideas, knowledge, and resources, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges that exist within our region. Other working groups have also included the Manitoba Premiers Office and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

As Regional Chief I have attended the following meetings and events:

- Chief and Council Inaugurations
- Treaty Day Celebrations
- Powwows
- Grand Openings
- Ceremonies
- Community visits requested by Chiefs



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Regional Chief Willie Moore, Manitoba Region

National Portfolio #1 – Management Committee

As one of the five Regional Chiefs appointed to the Management Committee, we were involved in the selection process for a new Chief Executive Officer for the AFN. Other work includes the discussion and approval of contracts for various assemblies, gatherings, and forums hosted by the AFN, as well as reviewing and discussing budgets presented to the AFN Executive Committee.

Path Ahead:

As we move forward together, our journey is guided by the wisdom of our Knowledge Keepers, the resilience of our communities, and the determination of our people. We stand at a critical time where reconciliation, self-determination, and nation building presents both challenges and opportunities. To navigate this path, we must foster unity among our Nations, organizations, and communities. We must collaborate in meaningful dialogue with industry and partners as well as work with all levels of governments in order to advance reconciliation, always mindful of the need to support grassroots initiatives and community-driven projects.

Together, we can rebuild stronger, more resilient communities and create a brighter future for our children and generations to come, always thinking seven generations ahead.

Conclusion:

Continuing to work together as leaders and community members is essential. By collaborating and pooling our strengths, we can address common challenges and find solutions that allow us to create strong communities. Unity allows us to amplify our collective voices and advocate for the needs and rights of each of our communities.

I am wishing you all safe travels and a productive assembly, Ekosi.



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Regional Chief Bobby Cameron, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Treaty 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, Saskatchewan



Tansi, ʔedlanet'e, Hau, tonesked yaun? On behalf of the 74 First Nations, Veterans, FSIN Executive, Staff, and Senate, we extend greetings from the ancestral lands and unceded territories of the Cree, Dēnesųtíné, Saulteaux, the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota in kisiskâciwan (Saskatchewan).

Introduction

As the portfolio holder for Education and Gaming, I am deeply committed to advocating for the exercise of First Nations jurisdiction in these critical areas, rooted in our inherent and Treaty Rights. First Nations have the right to adequately funded, culturally appropriate education systems as we move toward achieving full First Nations control of First Nations education. Similarly, jurisdiction over economic activities such as gaming is fundamental to First Nations sovereignty and the well-being of our communities.

National Portfolio #1 – Education

First Nations students have distinct and inalienable rights, which include inherent and Treaty rights, to receive an education in accordance with their culture, values, traditions, and languages. As the National portfolio holder, I work with the Chiefs Committee on Education (CCOE) and National Indian Education Council (NIEC) to advocate for First Nations control of First Nations education and the conclusion of Regional Education Agreements (REAs). Successful REAs have been implemented across various First Nations regions. Despite this, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Department of Finance have refused to sign new ones over the last two budget cycles. In accordance with AFN Resolution 51/2024, *Chronic Underfunding in Education* we continue to advocate for renewed funding for First Nations education, which has previously been found to be underfunded by \$28 billion.

In Budget 2024, Canada invested \$1 billion in school food programs over five years, \$227 million of which will go to First Nations through the *Nation School Food Program*. The CCOE and NIEC have been vocal that the implementation of this program must support First Nations food sovereignty and that all program funding should go directly to First Nations. Work to support the National School Food Program will be continue, guided by AFN Resolution 52/2024, *National School Food Program*.

Post-secondary education (PSE) remains a right for all First Nations students, upheld by Inherent and Treaty Rights. While Budget 2024 announced \$247 million over three years to support the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), the Government of Canada still views First Nations PSE as a social program rather than a right. The CCOE and NIEC will continue to advocate for funding that supports each First Nation's vision for PSE, including an estimated \$10.7 billion for PSE models and First Nations PSE institutions.



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Regional Chief Bobby Cameron, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Treaty 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, Saskatchewan

The CCOE and NIEC also continue to prioritize First Nations education infrastructure by asserting First Nations jurisdiction and control of First Nations education through various co-development projects with ISC. Most recently, this included reforming the School Priority Ranking Framework, which improves the functionality and transparency of how First Nations receive new education capital and ensures First Nations are engaged during the ranking of regional priorities.

National Portfolio #2 – Gaming

Many First Nations have identified gaming as essential to generate wealth, economic development and sustainable self-sufficiency within First Nations. For First Nations to fully participate in gaming as a source of revenue for their economies, amendments to the *Criminal Code* are required. Bill S-268, *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and Indian Act*, which has completed second reading in Parliament, proposes legislative amendments to affirm First Nations jurisdiction on gaming activities on reserve lands. This legislation represents a potential step forward for First Nations full and fair participation in the gaming industry. As the national portfolio holder for gaming, I will continue to advocate for First Nations jurisdiction in this area, and our right to exercise self-determination over economic development within our communities.

Conclusion:

Our priority will always be our Inherent and Treaty Right to Education and asserting First Nations jurisdiction.

Hiy Hiy, ekosi

Bobby Cameron
AFN Regional Chief for Saskatchewan
Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations



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Regional Chief Terry Teegee, British Columbia



Chiefs, Hereditary Leaders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth!

Hadih, and greetings from beautiful Lheidli T'enneh territory. On behalf of the 204 First Nations in British Columbia (B.C.) and the B.C. Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) Board of Directors, I present this report, which provides an update on the ongoing work in our region and my portfolio areas.

Introduction:

This past year was a highly productive year for our Nations. Thank you to the Chiefs, leaders, and staff who have supported the important work the BCAFN has accomplished.

I would like to acknowledge the BCAFN Board of Directors, including Chief Jerry Jack, Brian Assu, Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir, Chief Maureen Luggi, and Chief Donald Sam, and Knowledge Keepers Dr. Gwendolyn Point, Dr. Robert Joseph, and Sempulayan Gonzales for their continued advocacy on behalf of the 204 First Nations in B.C. I also acknowledge the contributions of our youth representatives, Kyle Alec and Crystal Starr-Lewis, and welcome newly elected Women's Representative Cheryl Rule.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

Over the last 12 months, we have witnessed First Nations Children and Families initiatives in Canada and B.C., with movement in relation to the compensation for historical and ongoing discrimination in the child welfare system. We also saw a historic vote at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Calgary in October, where First Nations-in-Assembly did not support the draft Final Settlement Agreement on long-term reform of the child welfare system. This marks a pivotal moment in the transformation of child and family services. We have more work ahead of us.

In addition to this important work on child welfare, we continue to work toward the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Act* and its National Action Plan. BCAFN remains engaged with the Department of Justice through a bilateral B.C.-specific United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA) implementation table and remain hopeful that the successful recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over children and family services can be replicated in other areas under the UNDA. Despite this momentum, we remain concerned about the pace of the federal governments implementation of UNDA and we continue to apply pressure to ensure that the necessary processes are in place to ensure First Nations oversight, accountability, and the recognition of our rights to free, prior, and informed consent over all pieces of federal legislation, regulation, and policy which impacts our title and rights are recognized and timely implemented.



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Regional Chief Terry Teegee, British Columbia

This year has marked significant milestones for First Nations in British Columbia, including the 10th anniversary of the Tsilhqot'in Nation v. B.C. court decision and the signing of the Gaayhllxid/Giihlagalgang "Rising Tide" Haida Title Lands Agreement, which strengthens the Haida Nation's jurisdiction over their lands. These achievements are the result of extensive political advocacy and legal efforts.

The BCAFN is actively developing a First Nations Climate Leadership Agenda to address the impacts of climate change and working to support First Nations in climate change adaptation and environmental stewardship.

"We stand united in our grief and demand justice following the recent tragic deaths of nine Indigenous individuals at the hands of police. These incidents highlight systemic violence in our communities and signal an ongoing state of emergency that requires immediate government action."

BCAFN continues to seek systemic justice reform and implementation and recognition of Indigenous legal orders. We remain frustrated and call for urgency to address police violence against Indigenous peoples, especially following the decision to drop charges against Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers involved in the deaths of Dale Culver and Jared Lowndes. In response, the First Nations Leadership Council is advocating for a public inquiry into these issues.

Currently serving my third term as Regional Chief, I remain firmly committed to addressing our communities' challenges across multiple fronts - political, economic, environmental, and social. I continue to hold provincial and federal governments accountable for both historical colonial injustices and ongoing inequities.

At our 21st AGM, the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly had an opportunity to discuss the many urgent issues, including children and families, the climate emergency, cannabis governance and jurisdiction, food sovereignty, justice, economic development, border mobility, and other priority concerns. The Chiefs-in-Assembly passed 22 resolutions, and honoured and blanketed outgoing Board member Chief Lynda Price and women's representative Louisa Housty-Jones.



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Regional Chief Terry Teegee, British Columbia

National Portfolio #1 – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Regional Chief Terry Teegee chairs the AFN Chiefs Committee on UNDA. In December 2023, through Resolution 78/2023, the Chiefs established the Chiefs' Committee on UNDA, transitioning it from its previous ad-hoc status to a permanent standing committee. To ensure balanced regional representation, each AFN region was asked to appoint a representative. The Committee has held a number of meetings in 2024 and is currently finalizing its Terms of Reference, developing a workplan to support regional UNDA implementation, creating a national engagement framework, identifying and addressing key national priorities, and overseeing AFN's UNDA-related initiatives. At the July 2024 AGA, First Nations-in-Assembly passed AFN Resolution 33/2024, *Advancing FN Rights-Sustainable Funding Implementing the UN Declaration*, which reinforces that meaningful First Nations leadership in UNDA implementation requires sufficient, predictable, and sustainable funding. The resolution directs the AFN and the Chiefs' Committee to work with federal departments to co-develop sustainable funding models and calls for core capacity funding for First Nations and their representative governments. Looking ahead, the AFN will develop evaluation and reporting metrics to assess UNDA implementation progress from a First Nations perspective. These metrics will serve two purposes; supporting Canada's reporting obligations to First Nations and helping First Nations identify opportunities/gaps in rights implementation. The AFN will maintain transparency through quarterly reports available on their website. In 2025, the AFN will convene a National Policy Forum on UNDA bringing together leadership, technicians, and experts. This forum will facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices for supporting First Nations

"In many ways the Declaration Act was a ballot question, and the majority of British Columbians see the Declaration Act as a vital tool to advance reconciliation in the province."

National Portfolio #2 – Justice and Policing

Co-chaired by Regional Chief Terry Teegee, the AFN Police Taskforce continues its regular meetings with a focus on two key priorities, including establishing First Nation Police Forces as an essential service and securing sustainable, long-term funding for First Nation policing initiatives. Current challenges stem from Canada's inadequate support of First Nation policing. As highlighted in AFN Resolution 07/2021, *Creation and implementation of First Nations policing as an essential service*, the First Nations Policing Program (FNPP) remains severely underfunded, hindering Nations' right to self-determination in providing police



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Regional Chief Terry Teegee, British Columbia

services. While provincial and federal governments provide substantial resources to the RCMP for policing First Nations, First Nations policing organizations receive insufficient funding. In addition, we are seeing an increase in violence and death of Indigenous Peoples. The AFN and BCAFN will continue to advocate for a National Inquiry into killings of First Nations peoples by RCMP.

Throughout the year, Regional Chief Teegee and BCAFN staff have met regularly with the AFN to discuss the co-development of the National Indigenous Justice Strategy and receive updates on First Nations Policing. Ongoing engagement continues between BCAFN, BC First Nations Justice Council, and the AFN to develop this strategy. This sustained work led to AFN Resolution 15/2024, *Calls for Renewed Support of Co-development and Implementation of the IJS*, reaffirms collaboration with Justice Canada and the Minister of Justice in developing the National First Nations Justice Strategy, seeks funding for strategy implementation and regional supports, supports community-based, self-determined approaches grounded in First Nations principles, ensures new initiatives don't disrupt existing justice systems, and promotes collaboration.

National Portfolio #3 – National Fisheries Committee

As co-chair of the AFN National Fisheries Committee (AFN-NFC), Regional Chief Terry Teegee has been instrumental in advancing key national fisheries priorities. Over the past year, the AFN-NFC has focused on the draft federal Aquaculture Act and B.C.'s transition from open-net pen fish farming, implementing the Marshall Decision and *Peace on the Water* Senate Report, executing fisheries-related measures in the UNDA Action Plan, and ensuring the 2024 Fisheries Act review aligns with UN Declaration and strategic planning initiatives.

The 2019 Fisheries Act reforms mandated a parliamentary review every five years. On February 9, 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans initiated this comprehensive review. In response, Chiefs passed AFN Resolution 22/2024, *Fisheries Act 5-Year Review to Ensure Alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which calls for adequate resources and full First Nations participation in the review process, consistent with the UN Declaration. This review offers a crucial opportunity to strengthen First Nations' and Treaty right with fisheries governance.

Throughout 2024, Regional Chief Terry Teegee advocated for Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to address critical issues affecting salmon, ecosystems, and First Nations fisheries. A key priority was the transition away from open-net pen fish farms by 2025, as outlined in the draft federal Aquaculture Act. While DFO missed its July 2024 deadline to release the transition plan, originally part of a broader phase-out scheduled for 2029, BCAFN's position aligns with both AFN Resolution 26/2023, *Transition from Open-Net-Pen Fish Farming*, and the UNDA Action Plan (Measure 44). Regional Chief Teegee continues working with DFO to ensure the transition process respects First Nations' rights and interests, including economic, environmental, and social impacts.



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Path Ahead:

As we look forward, First Nations in B.C. are buoyed by the recent election of the BC New Democratic Party as we continue to strive towards the implementation of *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)*, including the implementation of Section 6 and 7 agreements and toward the alignment of provincial laws with DRIPA. We will continue to advocate for a full public inquiry into the deaths of First Nations people at the hands of police and continue to support First Nations in the resumption of their jurisdiction over children and families.

With the looming federal election, principles of reconciliation, and meeting the standards as set out by the UN Declaration is more important than ever. The fight for our title and Treaty rights remain crucial to our relationship with the Federal Crown, and we will remain steadfast in our call for self-determination, reform of the justice system, calling out racist ideologies, ensuring meaningful consultation and collaboration. As we move forward, the federal government must demonstrate genuine commitment to recognizing and implementing inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights through a true nation-to-nation relationship. This includes the protection of traditional territories and resources, while simultaneously reforming federal policies that impact Indigenous peoples. The implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, protection of Indigenous languages, and recognition of Indigenous legal systems and governance structures cannot be delayed any longer. To achieve meaningful change, we require dedicated long-term funding mechanisms that move beyond project-based approaches.

Conclusion:

A comprehensive approach to reconciliation and self-determination requires unwavering commitment from the federal government, sustained resources, and genuine partnership with First Nations. The path forward must be built on respect, understanding, and a shared vision for a better future for all Canadians.

Mussi Cho!

“First Nations will be focused on transforming a Child welfare system that has been rooted in racism and discrimination. There are structural issues with the agreement that prevent a true transformation. We will need ideas, concerns and perspectives from all regions to get this work done.”



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AFN Yukon Regional Chief Kluane Adamek, Aagé



Dä`nnch'e!

On behalf of the AFN Yukon Region, I acknowledge the Matriarchs, Chiefs, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, and community leaders who continue to be at the forefront of some of the most pressing issues of our time, demonstrating what it means to be a "Yukon That Leads!"

Introduction:

First, I'd like to thank former Regional Chief and AFN Yukon Knowledge Keeper Mary Jane Jim, who continues to provide our office with important guidance and advice to best support the priorities of Yukon First Nations.

As we approach the end of the year, I reflect on how proud I am of the entire Yukon Region and all Yukon First Nations leaders and citizens who have advanced priorities regionally, nationally, and beyond. Through the leadership of all Yukon First Nations, we are making progress on climate change mitigation and adaptation, language learning and revitalization, health, wellness, Arctic sovereignty and Northern defense, and more.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

In 2024, Yukon First Nations continued to push forward on a range of key issues of both regional, national, and international importance. Throughout the year, Yukon First Nations Chiefs and leaders convened at AFN Yukon Chiefs Summits and policy engagement sessions to address both their unique and shared challenges. During these Summits and forums, leadership from across the territory provided the AFN Yukon Region with clear guidance on the pressing issues they face. As the Regional Chief, I follow the direction of the rights holders and collaborate within the AFN Yukon Regional Office's mandate to support all Yukon First Nations in advancing their priorities and solutions.

The AFN Yukon Region is currently in the process of undertaking a collaborative project representing a partnership between our team and the North American and Arctic Defense and Security Network (NAADSN). The project will involve research and a series of regional dialogues with Yukon First Nations to identify defense and security priorities in the Yukon and Western North American Arctic. The work will produce a comprehensive discussion paper that offers concrete recommendations for strengthening collaboration between the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF) and Indigenous partners in the face of evolving Arctic security threats, as well as fact sheets and practical reference guides. AFN Yukon is planning a series of virtual open houses on a range of different defense-related topics to identify Yukon First Nations' concerns, interests, and priorities with respect to Arctic defense and security in an era of rising geopolitical tensions. The open house meetings will also focus on



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the role of Yukon in continental defense and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), and climate change as a complex and multi-faceted security challenge. The goal of this work is to ultimately enhance communications between Yukon First Nations and DND/CAF, and to identify partnership and procurement opportunities for Yukon First Nations governments, businesses and development corporations.

Yukon First Nations leadership have also given the AFN Yukon Regional Office a mandate to establish a streamlined, coordinated process for ongoing meetings between Yukon First Nations and federal Ministers and representatives. This initiative is crucial for developing a unique and impactful platform dedicated to addressing the priorities of Yukon First Nations in collaboration with Canada. Establishing a direct and permanent forum for dialogue between Yukon First Nations and the federal government is a top priority that our Regional Office continues to work on with our federal partners, alongside the need for stable and adequate core funding for the Regional Office to be able to support the goals of Yukon First Nations.

“This is a time for us to get it right. It’s about challenging the Territorial, Provincial, and Federal Governments, industry, and mining companies.

We need space for our conversations.” – Regional Chief Adamek

The AFN Yukon was proud to lead a delegation of Yukon First Nation Chiefs and leaders at the AFN Annual General Assembly, on the traditional territory of the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation, in July 2024. At this year’s Annual General Assembly (AGA), multiple important resolutions were passed through the leadership and support from Yukon First Nation Chiefs, including a resolution to ensure adequate funding for language programs and learning across regions. This resolution was largely championed over multiple years by Duane Gastant’ Aucoin and Tina Jules, and we raise our hands to them for their dedication to ensuring all Nations have access to funding to support language revitalization and language learners everywhere!

National Portfolio #1 – Environment and Climate Change

As AFN National Portfolio holder for Environment, Climate Change and Water Stewardship, I remain committed to advancing First Nation-led, values-driven solutions to regenerate and care for our lands and waters.

I was honoured to attend the AFN’s third annual National Climate Gathering “Catalyzing First Nations Climate and Conservation Leadership for Transformative Change” in October 2024. I lift up all those



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climate leaders who have come before, bringing us to where we are today, and I celebrate the youth and emerging leaders whose innovation, hard work, and heart-felt work is driving us towards a safer, cleaner, and brighter future. I am particularly proud of the climate leadership emerging from Yukon First Nations, especially from Youth and the Yukon First Nation Youth Climate Fellows (the “Children of Tomorrow”). The Yukon Region continues to support the advancement of the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Plan – the Reconnection Vision – which was developed by the Children of Tomorrow.

During the National Climate Gathering in October, the Reconnection Vision hosted a session facilitated by several incredible Yukon First Nation climate leaders including Jocelyn Joe-Strack, Kadrienne Hummel,

“Reconciliation cannot be rushed or forced. Before we can get to reconciliation, there must be truth.” – Regional Chief Adamek

Jennifer Mierau, Carissa Waugh, and Zakayla Netro. During the session, these climate leaders spoke with To Swim and Speak with Salmon, an organization that supports the knowledge building and skills development of Indigenous youth in the North to empower them to be leaders, stewards and advocates for their lands, waters, and communities.

National Portfolio #2 – Water

The AFN continues its advocacy for the recognition and respect of First Nations’ inherent and Treaty rights to water, particularly considering industrial activities threatening water systems. This includes promoting First Nations-led initiatives for water protection and ensuring the involvement of women and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making processes. Mandated by the First Nations-in-Assembly, our work focuses on three central themes: Marine Conservation and Biodiversity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Freshwater Protection.

Guided by the Advisory Committee on Climate Action and the Environment (ACE), I am proud of the work we are doing to ensure all water initiatives reflect First Nations’ priorities and knowledge through wholistic, whole-of-government, and distinction-based approaches.

The AFN will continue to work with the Ministers of Indigenous Services Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Natural Resources Canada to prevent mining-related harm to First Nations communities. Efforts will also focus on advancing the First Nations Clean Water Act (Bill C-61) to uphold self-governance rights and source water protection, as well as engaging with the Canada Water Agency to develop a First Nations-led stewardship task force.



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National Portfolio #3 – Modern Treaties and Self-Government Agreements

Almost 50% of Canada’s signed Modern Treaties are based in the Yukon, making this region a nation-wide leader when it comes to First Nations modelling and carrying out this approach to self-government. While First Nations with signed Modern Treaties and Self-Government Agreements are actively working to implement their agreements in full, the relationships established through these agreements must be met with equal commitment from the federal government.

When the Government of Canada introduced the Collaborative Modern Treaty Implementation Policy in 2023, federal officials were provided with clear direction on the Crown’s obligations for full and fair implementation of Modern Treaties and Self-Government Agreements. The Policy was also supposed to improve communication between federal departments and First Nations across the country and committed Canada to co-developing independent implementation mechanisms with Modern Treaty partners. We must continue to advocate for the federal government to ensure adequate, sustainable, long-term funding for the implementation of all Modern Treaties and agreements. I look forward to joining the Lands Claims Agreements Coalition (LCAC) in early 2025 to celebrate 50 years of Modern Treaties and learn from the successes and challenges Nations have faced as they chart their paths to sovereignty.

It is equally important to support and advance the work being done by Nations who are asserting their rights to self-government in ways beyond Modern Treaty development. The right of self-government is not limited to one form of implementation, and we must find opportunities for First Nations to collaborate and share best practices with each other.

“We are here to share stories and walk together, to be bold, take those steps, and talk about your vision for the future. All our decisions today are for the future of the seven generations.” – Elder Lorraine Netro



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AFN Yukon Regional Chief Kluane Adamek, Aagé

Path Ahead:

2024 has been a challenging year, marked by the loss of Matriarchs, Knowledge Keepers, and young people taken from us far too soon. It has also been a year of many special accomplishments, shared learning, collaboration, hope, and vision that will keep us moving forward in a good way.

As all 14 Yukon First Nations continue to chart their own paths, the AFN Yukon Regional Office remains committed to supporting their goals and interests – at the direction of Chiefs and leaders, and we will continue to work with Crown government partners to address and advance these priority areas. As Regional Chief, and on behalf of the entire AFN Yukon Region, I would like to express my pride and gratitude for the leadership of all 14 Yukon First Nations, each of whom are forging their own paths towards a bright future for the next seven generations.

Conclusion:

I take great pride in the leadership, creativity, and vision that continues to emerge from Yukon First Nations year after year, and I am optimistic that their innovation and leadership will make 2025 a year of excitement and inspiration.

Gunalchéesh, Mä`hsi' cho, Sógá sénlá', Shä`w níthän, Niyę sáw nîidhín, Tsin'ji choh!

Wishing all First Nations a wonderful end to 2024!

Dak`anutà jè' - take good care.



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Regional Chief/Dene National Chief George Mackenzie



We have made significant strides in advancing our collective vision of a strong, prosperous, and unified Dene Nation. This has been possible through our unwavering commitment to our values, traditions, and the tireless efforts of our Elders, leaders, communities, and partners.

Introduction:

On behalf of the Dene Nation, I extend greetings to all of you. I am grateful for this opportunity to share Dene priorities and share updates on the important work of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN.) As the newly elected Dene National Chief, part of my role and responsibility is to represent the Northwest Territories (NWT) Region at the

AFN. As AFN Regional Chief for the NWT Region, I hold substantial responsibilities to the member Nations that I serve. I am tasked by my people to improve our relationships with the land to safeguard it for our future generations and uphold and protect the interests and values of the Dene.

Regional Key Issues and Activities:

One of the most pressing issues facing the Dene Nation is the need to address water and environmental concerns. Our region is rich in natural resources, such as oil and gas, diamonds, gold, critical minerals, and timber, that have contributed to the economic development of the area. However, industrial development has also resulted in significant environmental degradation, including the destruction of wetlands and forests, the contamination of rivers and lakes, and the release of harmful pollutants. The Dene Nation has consistently advocated for greater regulatory oversight, better consultation, and the implementation of comprehensive environmental monitoring programs to address these issues.

Another critical priority for the Dene Nation is health and wellness. First Nations communities in Canada have historically faced higher rates of chronic disease, substance abuse, and mental health issues than other populations. The Dene Nation is no exception, and our members have experienced significant health disparities due to a lack of access to adequate healthcare and mental health services. The Dene Nation has been working to address these gaps by advocating for greater funding for healthcare infrastructure, including the recruitment and training of more First Nations healthcare professionals, and the development of culturally appropriate health promotion programs.

Community safety is also a significant concern for the Dene Nation. The region has faced high levels of crime and violence. As part of our efforts to ensure community safety, the Dene Nation has been working to support the development of community-based programs and initiatives that promote community driven solutions and provide support and resources for those affected by crime and violence.



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Education is another critical priority for the Dene Nation. Like many First Nations, the Dene Nation has faced barriers to education, including a lack of access to high-quality schools and teachers, inadequate funding, and a lack of culturally relevant curriculum. The Dene Nation has been advocating for the development of First Nations-led solutions and the inclusion of First Nations culture and history in mainstream school curricula to address these issues.

Treaty rights are a significant priority for the Dene Nation. The Dene Nation continues to advocate for greater recognition and protection of our Treaty Rights. The Dene Nation has also been working to address the impacts of historical Treaty violations, including the loss of land and resources.

'Together we can build a strong and unified Dene Nation. To uphold and advocate for the rights, interests, and values of all our people.'

Community-driven projects and initiatives are an essential priority for the Dene Nation. The Dene Nation is a dynamic and growing Nation, driven by a deep commitment to the preservation and promotion of our culture, language, and traditions. Community-driven projects and initiatives, including language revitalization programs, cultural preservation initiatives, and community development projects, are critical to the ongoing vitality and growth of the Dene Nation.

In recent years, the Dene Nation has undertaken a significant initiative to revise and reform our constitution. The Dene Nation Constitution Reform Commission Project aims to strengthen and modernize the governance structures and processes of the Dene Nation, with a particular focus on enhancing transparency, accountability, and participation in decision-making. The Dene Nation has been working diligently to engage with community members, leaders, and partners to ensure that the revised constitution reflects the priorities and values of the entire Nation.

Finally, upholding and protecting the rights and interests of the Dene Nation is a fundamental priority. The Dene Nation has been working to build strong partnerships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, governments, and organizations, to advance our collective interests and to promote the rights and dignity of our people. The Dene Nation has also been actively engaged in national and international efforts to address issues such as climate change, the protection of cultural heritage sites, and the recognition of First Nations knowledge and practices.



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National Portfolio #1 – Emergency Management

I am very eager to begin supporting work on the Emergency Management portfolio. I view the responsibility as an important foundation for our work moving forward. In 2023, approximately 70% of the population in Denendeh (NWT) experienced evacuations, and it is critical we improve the relationships between governments of all levels and First Nations to ensure First Nations are able to receive adequate and culturally safe emergency services that are responsive and support their own self-determined approaches. Emergency Management is about protecting people, places, and things. Now, more than ever, we need to build relationships to ensure that First Nations people, places, and things are comprehensively represented in new emergency management policy and programming. With our focus on climate resilience and the human aspect of managing hazards we can make a strong case for proactive investment in emergency management.

First Nations know that Canada must do more to ensure that new and existing emergency management policies and programs support First Nations in continuing to safeguard our territories. As a core objective of the AFN's Emergency Management work is to support a shift from reactive emergency management response to the pro-active work that provides improvements and investments in emergency preparedness. In February 2024, the AFN met with National Indigenous Organizations (NIOs), federal and provincial ministers to develop relationships, communications planning, and inter-agency engagement as part of Public Safety Canada's annual Indigenous-Federal-Provincial-Territorial meeting with ministers responsible for emergency management.

National Portfolio #2 – Indian Residential Institutions

The value of continuing to advocate for justice and healing related to Indian Residential Institutions, as well as addressing the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action, is critical in advancing a path forward for First Nations in Canada. Despite the challenges of ongoing systemic oppression, First Nations and our allies have been working to raise awareness of the lasting impacts of Residential Institutions and to demand accountability for the harm done. The TRC Calls to Action provide a roadmap for addressing the legacy of Residential Institutions and working toward reconciliation. However, progress has been slow, and there is still much work to be done in terms of implementing these calls to action. Through sustained and ongoing efforts, First Nations and their allies can begin to address the trauma and intergenerational impacts of residential schools and work toward a future of reconciliation and healing.

'Our people must be at the table when decisions are made that affect our lands, our waters, and our ways of life. Our voices must be heard and our rights respected.'



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In October 2024, the Office of the Special Interlocutor (OSI) released their final report. The AFN has drafted a resolution for the December SCA that supports the finding and the full implementation of the OSI recommended framework that includes the recommendations provided by AFN. The AFN is updating the 2024 TRC Report Cards and actively monitoring progress of the calls to action in reflection of the OSI report. We must continue to advocate for increased funding to support these critical initiatives and meaningfully fulfill resolutions related to this critical work.

Path Ahead:

The Dene Nation's path ahead is focused on achieving fair and equitable inclusion in child welfare compensation and long-term reform. Additionally, we are committed to continuing to advocate for the wellness, prosperity, and priorities of Dene communities. Our biggest priority remains our Dene communities and the people we represent. To achieve these goals, the Dene Nation will continue to work collaboratively with government and other partners to advance, uphold, and protect the interests and values of the Dene. We look forward to prioritizing community-driven solutions, in full consultation with leadership and communities. This approach will ensure all members of the Dene Nation feel valued, supported, and represented in decisions that affect our lives and futures. In addition, the Dene Nation will advocate for policies and initiatives that promote environmental sustainability, protect Indigenous knowledge and practices, and address issues related to infrastructure, health care, and education. These priorities will be achieved through a combination of advocacy, capacity building, and direct service delivery. Overall, the Dene Nation's path ahead is focused on continued progress towards reconciliation, justice, and equity for all members of its communities. Through partnerships, community-driven solutions, and advocacy, we will build a sustainable and prosperous future for our people.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, as the Dene National Chief, I am committed to collaboration, dialogue, and engagement with all to advance the interests and rights of our people. We must work together to address the challenges facing our communities and ensure a better future for our children and future generations.

In solidarity and strength, together we uphold and protect the interests and values of the Dene.

'Reconciliation is not a one-time event, it is a continuous journey. We must work together in partnership and respect to achieve true progress.'

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT





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Message from the Chief Executive Officer



She:kon, Pjil'asi, OKI, Kwe kwe, Boozhoo, Tan'si, Gilakas'la. Aanii.

Andrew Bisson ndishnikaaz. M'Chigeeng First Nation ndoonjiba. Makwa ndoodem.

Chiefs, Proxies, Honoured Guests, and Delegates, it is with great pleasure that I join the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief and the Executive Committee in welcoming you to the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly (SCA). I want to acknowledge the traditional unceded lands we are gathering on and extend my gratitude to the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation for hosting us. I am grateful for this opportunity to gather in person and for the chance to reflect on the important work we undertake together this year.

I was deeply honoured to be hired as Chief Executive Officer of the AFN on September 30, 2024. The past few months have been a busy and productive time for the Secretariat as we continue to advance resolutions and mandates provided to the AFN by First Nations-in-Assembly.

In October, we hosted an SCA in Calgary, Alberta, focused on the Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services. Events, like the SCAs, require a great deal of effort across the Secretariat, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all AFN staff for their dedication and hard work in making it a success.

The December 2024 SCA is another important gathering, bringing together hundreds of Chiefs, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, youth, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and other participants from coast-to-coast-to-coast to discuss, deliberate, and advance critical priorities and issues impacting our communities. These discussions are particularly significant as we look ahead to a potential federal election in 2025 and consider its implications for First Nations priorities.

I look forward to the meaningful discussions over the coming days, as it is the leadership and perspectives of First Nations leadership that are essential to guiding the work of the AFN and advancing the priorities and direction set by First Nations-in-Assembly. Together, we will continue this important work in service of our Nations.

Wishing you a successful and productive assembly, and a joyful, peaceful holiday season with your families and communities.

Miigwech,

Andrew Bisson
Chief Executive Officer