



Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAN STATEMENT ON CANADA 150

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, on behalf of the Executive Council, has issued the following statement on Canada 150 celebrations:

“Canada will celebrate 150 years of Confederation this weekend, but for many Indigenous people there is no cause for celebration. This country has prospered, but our First Nation communities remain impoverished; our youth are denied their rights to education, and our people continue to suffer.

The Government of Canada wastes millions of dollars fighting legal battles to deny justice to our people through the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, the Sixties Scoop class action, the St. Anne’s Indian Residential School hearings, and took no position on joint slate of recommendations put to the jury at the Seven Youth Inquest into the deaths of our students in Thunder Bay. The landmark Tribunal ruling in January 2016 found that First Nations are discriminated against in the delivery of child welfare services. But instead of complying with the order, the federal government continues to fight the decision in court.

This government has made strong commitments to healing and reconciliation, and we are disheartened this is not reflected in the actions of its lawyers and bureaucrats.

It is unacceptable for the Prime Minister to blame Indigenous communities for the failures of his government, and those before it, in the delivery of services to our communities. Our leaders have always accepted the responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities, but it’s Ottawa that holds the purse strings.

The Prime Minister’s suggestion that our leaders have failed to lead or articulate their needs is incorrect and insulting. We have presented countless proposals to improve the delivery of services in our communities – the majority of which are ignored or denied for what Ottawa often claims is a lack of funding. For example, prior to the recent suicide crisis in Wapekeka, leadership identified at-risk youth and submitted a compressive suicide prevention strategy to Health Canada. It was denied by the bureaucracy because it came at an ‘awkward time’ in the funding cycle.

Similarly, the Prime Minister’s claim that Indigenous communities don’t have the capacity to use the money he’s prepared to provide is condescending and

incompatible with his message of reconciliation. How can our communities develop capacity when our federal Treaty partner refuses to collaborate with us on a Nation-to-Nation basis?

NAN First Nations know the services and support they need, and we have institutions in place to articulate and address these needs. We are more than ready to develop and control our own programs and services. Where there are gaps in capacity, it is the result of discriminatory under-funding by Ottawa.

First Nations aren't failing, the Government of Canada is.

Looking back on the past 150 years it is obvious that much of Canada's history is a fabrication, written by European settlers celebrating the colonization of land inhabited for centuries by our ancestors. Indigenous Peoples were the first to govern this land, long before Confederation. They were self-determining Nations with distinct cultures, languages, laws, traditions and a unique understanding of our land and environment.

This government has missed a great opportunity to confront its colonial past and the injustices inflicted on our people. If Ottawa was serious about its relationship with Indigenous Peoples, it should have included a national effort to promote reconciliation during this sesquicentennial.

This weekend we will honour all those we have lost and those who persevere in the face of adversity, including our brothers and sisters camped out on Parliament Hill. We will give thanks for the resilience of our people, the wisdom of our Elders, the aspirations of our youth, and the strength of our leaders. That is something worth celebrating.”

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