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NOVEMBER 7, 2024

UNITED DELEGATION OF DENE LEADERS ON SPECIAL CHIEFS' ASSEMBLY – LONG- TERM REFORM OF THE FIRST NATIONS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES (FNCFS) PROGRAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH – NOVEMBER 7, 2024] The Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly on Child Welfare and Long-Term Reform was hosted on October 15th-18th, 2024, along with Indigenous leaders representing First Nations across Canada. The Dene Nation brought a large delegation to advocate for fair and equitable inclusion of the Northwest Territories (NWT) and our children in this historic and unprecedented compensation package.

The Dene Nation attended the Assembly with the intention of securing inclusion in the Final Settlement Agreement. This would be a significant step towards providing compensation for past harms, reforming Canada's child welfare system, and addressing the injustices caused by past discriminatory policies.

Dene National Chief George Mackenzie stated, "Our delegation came to this Special Chiefs Assembly in Calgary seeking full, fair and equitable inclusion in this agreement. We will not accept anything less. Every child matters!"

During the Assembly, the Dene Nation held a full-day northern caucus session to discuss the needs and priorities of Dene leaders and their communities. The caucus highlighted the unique issues Indigenous communities from the NWT face and allowed Chiefs to explore solutions and amendments to the agreement. This culminated in the development of Late Resolution-#02 "Ensuring Fair and Equitable Inclusion of the Northwest Territories in the Child Welfare Compensation and Long-Term Reform Final Settlement Agreement."

"The Dene Chiefs worked relentlessly, from morning until night, together in unity. There was a clear commitment by all to fight for the rights of our Dene children." Said former Premier of the Northwest Territories Stephen Kakfwi who attended the Assembly to serve as a strategic advisor to Dene Nation.

This resolution called on the Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada to take action to address the historical impact of the child welfare system on First Nations Children in the Northwest Territories. Also, the resolution calls on the Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada to include the Dene Nation fairly and equitably in all aspects of the Child Welfare Compensation and Long-Term Reform Final Settlement Agreement.



Dene National Chief brought this resolution to the Assembly of First Nations Executive Committee meeting, attended by Regional Chiefs from across Canada, where he strongly advocated for the direction provided by the Dene Nation Chiefs to be implemented by the Assembly of First Nations.

“As Dene leaders, we stand united in our beliefs that it is our inherent and Treaty right to ensure our children and families are respected, and supported, and we are committed to working toward a Dene-led solution. The funding and resources we are advocating for, related to compensation and long-term reform must be provided directly to our people and their First Nations, and not to the Government of the Northwest Territories.” stated Dene National Chief Mackenzie.

Delegates from the Dene Nation also met with the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Cindy Woodhouse-Nepinak, as well as the Department of Indigenous Services Canada, to advocate for meaningful inclusion of the NWT in the Final Settlement Agreement. The Dene Nation was advised that Indigenous Services Canada would provide funding for an exploratory process where Dene Nation communities could assume responsibility and authority over Child and Family Services in their respective communities if they chose.

However, the Dene Nation could not receive a satisfactory formal commitment from Indigenous Services Canada that the Dene children would be fully included in the Final Settlement Agreement, and as a result, the Chiefs of the Dene Nation voted in support of AFN Resolutions:

- Draft Resolution-02, Addressing Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program and Jordan’s Principle **was passed**.
Votes: 186 for; 7 opposed; 10 abstained
- Draft Resolution-04, Meaningful Consultation on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services **was passed**.
Votes: 179 for; 6 opposed; 4 abstained

These resolutions called for a new negotiation process to begin, which would address the concerns and issues brought forward by Dene Nation Chiefs and would allow more time and opportunity for the Dene Nation, to engage in the necessary negotiations and lobbying to achieve full, fair, and equitable inclusion in this historic deal.

The Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly on Child Welfare and Long-Term Reform marks a historic moment, demonstrating unity and strength of the Dene Nation in addressing injustices faced by our children and families, and commitment to building a better future for Dene communities.

As the Dene Nation continues to advocate for Dene children and families' rights, we are committed to working with the Assembly of First Nations, the Government of Canada, and all stakeholders toward a comprehensive and equitable solution that ensures justice, fair compensation, and a future for our children we can all look forward to.

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