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PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

DENE NATIONAL CHIEF TO FIRST MINISTERS: PROTECT OUR WATER, OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR PLACE AT THE TABLE

Ottawa meeting brings new federal money for community safety and emergency management, and a promise to meet again

[OCTOBER 29, 2026, YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH] – Dene National Chief George Mackenzie carried a clear message from Denendeh to the First Nations–First Ministers' Meeting in Ottawa on October 26: protect the rivers that flow north through Dene lands, bring Dene First Nations to the table from the beginning to the end of every major project, and make sure Dene communities see real and lasting benefits from those projects.

"Our Treaties were made to last as long as the sun shines and the river flows," said Dene National Chief Mackenzie. "This meeting was a start. Now the money must reach our communities, and the promises must be kept. Mahsi cho to the Grand Chiefs who stood with us in Ottawa."

Prime Minister Mark Carney hosted the meeting, the first of its kind in more than two decades, with Premiers and nearly 200 First Nations leaders on unceded Algonquin territory. Dene National Chief Mackenzie took part as Dene National Chief and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Regional Chief for the Northwest Territories.

"We came to Ottawa with a clear message, and we delivered it," said Dene National Chief Mackenzie. "We're not against major development. But we also know the Northwest Territories is the last frontier of the wilderness. Once major development comes – it most likely will never be the same. That is why the Dene must be at the table from the start to the finish."

What the Dene National Chief delivered

In Ottawa, the Dene National Chief pressed the Prime Minister and Premiers on five priorities:

- **Clean water.** The Dene will never agree to oil sands companies releasing treated tailings into the Athabasca River, which flows north into the Mackenzie River and the Arctic Ocean. Canada must not make rules that allow it without the consent of the Dene and Treaty 8 Nations downstream.
- **Major projects done right.** Ottawa should make sure Dene First Nations are part of projects from start to finish, and land claims processes should be receiving increased support and assistance.
- **Real benefits from major projects.** If major projects are to happen, they need to be accompanied by major investments in wellness, education, community safety, child and family services, training, employment and procurement opportunities. "This cannot be billions for concrete and crumbs for communities," the Dene National Chief said. "Communities and our people need to see, feel and experience real and lasting benefits from these projects."
- **Community safety.** "We have a drug crisis in every one of our communities," he said. "If we don't address the drug problem, and another major development is coming, our young people will not be ready."

- **A real seat at the table.** AFN Regional Chiefs should have the same time and access as Premiers, and these meetings should happen twice a year.

What was achieved

The Prime Minister closed the meeting with commitments that respond to Dene priorities:

- **Community Safety.** More than $630 million over four years, plus $250 million a year ongoing, to renew and expand First Nations and Inuit policing agreements, and $140 million over four years for crime prevention and community safety. The Dene Nation will continue to seek this support for its Task Force on Drugs, Alcohol and Community Crime Prevention and for Dene-led policing.
- **Emergency Management.** More than $2.5 billion over five years, plus nearly $450 million ongoing, for evacuations, emergency assistance, rebuilding and firefighting. Dene National Chief Mackenzie holds the AFN's Emergency Management portfolio, and Denendeh knows the need first-hand.
- **Meeting Again.** Agreement to hold future First Nations–First Ministers' Meetings and to open federal and provincial tables to First Nations. The Dene National Chief will keep pushing for regular meetings.
- **Bill S-2 – Indian Status.** The Prime Minister said the federal response is "coming soon." The Dene position is clear: end the second-generation cut-off.
- **Economic Participation.** New revenue-sharing tools, including a possible First Nations Sovereign Wealth Fund, and $260 million over four years for a new Partnerships for Indigenous Workforce Readiness Fund.

The Dene were also recognized at the table. In her opening remarks, AFN National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said First Nations "are standing on guard on Canada's Arctic sovereignty … and we lift up the Dene people." The Prime Minister named the Mackenzie Valley Highway as a project that is "finally moving forward." Dene National Chief Mackenzie's remarks were warmly received, and he is grateful for the many kind words shared with him.

Dene National Chief Mackenzie was joined in Ottawa by Grand Chief Herb Norwegian of the Dehcho First Nations and Grand Chief Wilbert Kochon of the Sahtú Dene Council. Grand Chief Norwegian called on the Prime Minister to give Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Rebecca Alty the direction and tools to complete the Dehcho land and governance agreement. The Dene Nation thanks Dene Nation Elder Felix Lockhart and Brenda Gauthier, Chairperson of the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council, who also attended and contributed their expertise and perspectives.

Before the November 5 federal budget, the Dene Nation will follow up with federal ministers to seek direct access for Dene First Nations to the new safety and emergency funds, and answers on oil sands tailings and the second-generation cut-off. Any process to move beyond the Indian Act must be decided by First Nations, and ending the cut-off cannot wait for it.

Mahsi,

George Mackenzie,
Dene National Chief, Regional Chief AFN-NT Region

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