

Conferences

PRESS RELEASE - WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES ACROSS CANADA

Yellowknife, NT. May 12, 2015: The Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG), composed of provincial and territorial Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and National Aboriginal Organization (NAO) Leaders, met in Yellowknife today to review progress and explore future opportunities to be advanced in the priority areas of education, economic development, housing, ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls, disaster mitigation and emergency management in Aboriginal communities.

Ministers and NAO Leaders discussed the outcomes of the first [National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) held in Ottawa on February 27, 2015. Ministers and NAO Leaders called on the federal government to join in the development, implementation and funding of a prevention and awareness campaign aimed at ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Delivering this campaign was a key outcome from the National Roundtable. Manitoba will also host in fall 2015 an inaugural meeting for law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim services, to explore best practices and better coordinate and share information on policing and justice responses to these cases. Ministers and NAO Leaders continued to support the NAO Leaders' call on the federal government to hold a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls.

Acknowledging that Aboriginal women continue to face barriers to gender equality, education and employability, Ministers and NAO Leaders discussed and directed continued development of a Socio-Economic Action Plan for Aboriginal Women.

Ministers and NAO Leaders also discussed the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care. The AAWG recognizes the important work being done by the working group on Aboriginal children in care and acknowledged the need for all governments to work in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples and communities to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care across the country.

Ministers and NAO Leaders endorsed continued co-operation to advance activities supporting First Nations (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis communities, and renewed the invitation to the federal government to be a formal partner with AAWG to take action in building safe, vibrant and healthy communities and addressing socio-economic gaps. Ministers and NAO leaders noted the upcoming federal election presents an opportunity for all Canadians to engage candidates on key issues facing Aboriginal peoples.

The discussion and recommendations from today's meeting will be shared with Premiers during the next meeting of Premiers and NAO Leaders on July 14-15, 2015, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ministers and NAO Leaders agreed to meet again in Early 2016 to review progress on these activities.

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“NWAC is pleased to see that critical issues such as violence, education, housing, economic development, disaster mitigation and Aboriginal children in care are being addressed by the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG). Continued efforts and collaboration between all levels of government --Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) and National Aboriginal Organizations (NAOs) -- is urgently needed to address the high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and for them to achieve equality with that of their Canadian counterparts. The issue of violence against Aboriginal women is so complex that we need a comprehensive strategic approach and not the piecemeal band-aid solutions of the past if we are to address the grave violation of the basic human rights of aboriginal women and girls.”

Native Women’s Association of Canada, Interim President, Dr. Dawn Harvard

“The AAWG provides an ongoing intergovernmental forum for addressing issues of critical importance to Aboriginal peoples. It is important for us to keep applying ourselves to the task at hand and to create a collaborative environment that will lead to tangible results. I am pleased with progress on economic development and education and look forward to tackling issues related to improving the child welfare system and violence against children and women.”

Métis National Council Vice-President, David Chartrand

“That it is imperative for us to work with the Provinces and Territories to ensure that the Metis people within the homeland are a part of solutions moving forward and that a Metis specific process will ensure the success of the collaborative initiatives. The AAWG gives us the opportunity to move forward with that focus.”

Women of the Métis Nation President, Melanie Omeniho

“The social and economic costs of maintaining the status quo costs First Nations and all Canadians, with First Nations children paying the highest price. We can and must do better. The focus must be on outcomes. I told the Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Premiers in attendance that we need to reframe the work to create results for our peoples. New investments and action are needed to close the gap in the quality of life between First Nations and other Canadians – to support Indigenous languages, to have access to adequate housing, to prevent violence against women and girls and to keep our children in safe and supportive homes and out of the child welfare system. We agreed here that closing the gap is a priority for all of us and I look forward to the hard work of making that a reality.”

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde

“On behalf of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and our Board of Directors, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing work and commitment of the AAWG to advancing the rights of and opportunities for Indigenous people in Canada. I was pleased to provide remarks about the importance of appropriate and accessible education for our Inuit communities. I was also proud to update the AAWG on the progress of ITK’s Amaujaq National Centre for Inuit Education’s strategy ‘First Canadians, Canadians First’ working to get Inuit children to school every day, on time, well-rested and ready to learn”

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President, Terry Audla

“In the Northwest Territories our experience is that we are stronger and more successful when we work together as partners. This has been at the foundation of our commitment to engage with Aboriginal governments and organizations in the spirit of respect, recognition and responsibility. As the Chair of the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group, I am encouraged by the progress we have made and the commitment of all provinces, territories and National Aboriginal Organizations to engage in collaborative and respectful dialogue. The Aboriginal Affairs Working Group will continue to work in partnership to develop solutions and build on successes that help to improve the well-being of Aboriginal peoples across Canada.”

Honorable Bob McLeod, Premier and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, Northwest Territories

“The Aboriginal Affairs Working Group continues to be a productive and constructive venue for dialogue and I greatly appreciate the collaboration and leadership shown by the provinces and territories, as well as from the other National Aboriginal Organizations over the past six years. There is much work ahead for all of us in addressing Canada’s greatest injustice, the denial of the rights of Aboriginal Peoples. Working together, we can make a difference.”

National Chief Betty Ann Lavallee, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

BACKGROUND

About the AAWG

The AAWG is composed of provincial and territorial Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and leaders from five National Aboriginal Organizations (NAOs): the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Métis National Council (MNC) and the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC).

The AAWG was formed in 2009 when premiers directed their respective Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs to work with the five NAOs to examine how all governments and NAOs can work more effectively to improve outcomes for First Nations (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis. The AAWG continues to encourage federal government participation.

Meeting Highlights

Ministers and NAO Leaders discussed the critical and fundamental socio-economic gaps that exist between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Canadians and the need to address these gaps:

Education

Ministers and NAO leaders endorsed the work of the Aboriginal Education Working Group as outlined within the AAWG/Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Joint Workplan for 2015-2016.

The AAWG/CMEC Joint Workplan includes the following initiative, among others: strategies to encourage Aboriginal self-identification in education; an Aboriginal Educators' Symposium in Yellowknife which will bring together both new and experienced Aboriginal educators from across Canada to discuss teacher training experiences and challenges; ensuring that all Canadian educators have an understanding and awareness of the history and legacy of Canadian Indian residential schools; and developing a teaching resource that explores the history and legacy of Canadian Indian residential schools designed for use in Bachelor of Education and pre-service teaching programs.

Economic Development

- The AAWG appreciates the potential value of a national forum proposed by the AFN, on key issues related to First Nations, (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis men and women and their participation in the economy including exploring regional economic-focused platforms to support resource development, employment and training, procurement, clean energy opportunities, connectivity and capacity issues. AFN is asked to keep AAWG members updated on this event.
- In recognition of recent national reports on First Nations, (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis participation in the economy, members of the AAWG, wherever possible, will work with their respective local Aboriginal communities to promote joint ventures, equity participation or other forms of partnership between Aboriginal groups and industry proponents to increase participation for Aboriginal men and women and partnerships in resource development.
- The AAWG will encourage the federal government to continue to invest in labour market and skills development programs for First Nations, (regardless of status or residency), Métis and Inuit men and women to ensure they possess the right skills to find sustainable and meaningful employment. In particular, AAWG will recommend renewal and enhancement of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy beyond 2016.
- The AAWG endorses the newly designed Economic Development - success stories (best practices) website as presented.

Ending Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls

- Ministers and NAO Leaders approve the Coordinating Action to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls status template and direct PTs and NAOs to use the template when submitting annual status updates to the AAWG.

- That Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the Ending Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls working group (EVAAWG) to support NAOs, provincial, territorial and federal governments and contribute to the implementation of the commitments from the 2015 National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- That Ministers and NAO Leaders continue to support NAO Leaders' call on the federal government to hold a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls, including a call to the federal government to consult with the provinces, territories and NAOs on the terms of reference for the proposed inquiry.

Aboriginal Housing

- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the Aboriginal Housing Working Group (AHWG) to conduct a review of innovative building and funding approaches for Aboriginal housing development to determine lessons learned and leading practices and to ensure sustainable future growth in housing for First Nations (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis. This work will be presented to the AAWG in Spring 2016.
- The AHWG will assess the growing demand for Aboriginal housing in order to identify the gap between inventory and need. Some activities of this could include the review of related surveys, including the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and the most recent Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS). Following this assessment, the AHWG will develop a strategy which includes targets and a focused ask to the Federal Government to address these gaps. This work will be presented to the AAWG in Spring 2016.
- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the Housing Working Group to conduct a review of federal operating agreements in place in the First Nations (regardless of status or residency), Inuit and Métis housing sectors. This will be brought to the AAWG for plenary discussion in the Spring of 2016 and may be used to engage the federal government on the need for development of a sustainable long-term funding strategy for Aboriginal housing.
- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the chair of the AAWG to send a letter to the chair of the Provincial/Territorial Housing Forum to promote information exchange and encourage continued collaboration between the P/T Housing Forum and the AAWG.

Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management in Aboriginal Communities and Emergency Measures

- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the continued identification of priorities and strategies to address disaster mitigation and emergency management services in Aboriginal communities, including cross jurisdictional analysis of emergency management programs and initiatives.
- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management working group to continue to seek opportunities to coordinate and collaborate with the Canadian Council of Emergency Management Organizations and Senior Officials Responsible for Emergency Management in order to avoid duplication of mandates and work plans.
- Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the continued analysis of the impacts of past federal budget commitments and recent changes to the National Disaster Mitigation Program and

Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements funding formula with respect to provinces, territories and Aboriginal groups/communities.

Ministers and NAO Leaders direct the Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Management working group to build a knowledge base on emergency management and disaster mitigation measures in place to identify trends and gaps across the country as they relate to Aboriginal communities and share information with the AAWG on possible next steps for discussion (where appropriate). Next steps could include exploring interest in a learning event on Aboriginal disaster mitigation and emergency management services based on the identified trends and gaps.