



RECONCILIATION CHARTER

for

FIRST NATIONS CHILD & FAMILY WELL-BEING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

SHARED ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The current child welfare system in British Columbia as it relates to First Nations children and youth is in a crisis state, as evidenced by the disproportionate number of children and youth in care, and the multitude of reports and recommendations relating to the ways the system has failed Indigenous communities.

This reality requires our focused attention, priority, sustained and genuine commitment, and shared purpose to take action for real change - as a matter of human rights, Aboriginal rights, and social justice.

We have a collective responsibility, based on our respective authorities and mandates, to work to provide the best supports and services possible to ensure the physical, emotional, mental health, safety and well-being of First Nations children and youth in British Columbia, provided in a flexible and culturally appropriate way that honours and nurtures their particular identities, capacities, needs and potential.

First Nations children have distinct rights internationally and domestically as children, and as First Nations, and they must benefit from the same fundamental rights and freedoms as every other person free, from discrimination in any form.

We acknowledge the tragic and wide-ranging impacts and legacy of the residential school program in Canada, which had as its purpose the full assimilation of First Nations people, well documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

We acknowledge the vital and urgent need for active and purposeful reconciliation between the Crown and First Nations in relation to children and families.

We acknowledge that there is a principled framework available to us for supporting First Nations and for reforming Indigenous child welfare and family services in BC – set out in the TRC Calls to Action, section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the “principled framework”).

We acknowledge that Aboriginal title, rights and/or treaty rights exist in British Columbia and that the Crown has corresponding duties when it contemplates a decision that may adversely affect these rights.

The Government-to-Government relationship is between each First Nation and the Crown. The Crown also has a fiduciary relationship with First Nations that has been described in Canadian case law.

We support the process of First Nations exercising greater authority with regard to child and family well-being. We acknowledge that First Nation peoples have governed themselves since time immemorial, continue to do so today, will do so into the future, and that their right of self-determination is affirmed in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

We acknowledge that, currently, First Nations exercise varying degrees of authority over First Nation child and family well-being and are at varying stages of development of their vision and implementation of child and family well-being systems and supports. We will work collaboratively to create a range of flexible options that are responsive to First Nations' capacity and needs.

This Reconciliation Charter is a high-level political commitment of the three parties, within their respective mandates, to bring about systemic change in relation to First Nations child and family well-being in British Columbia. The First Nations Leadership Council serves as an advocacy body, directed by First Nations through resolutions of the three political organizations.

For clarity, this work does not replace any existing discussions or negotiations respecting child and family well-being that any agency or government department may currently have underway with additional partners, including First Nation communities and/or Aboriginal organizations, nor does it preclude such discussions or negotiations being initiated.

SHARED OBJECTIVES

We agree that our shared objective is for First Nations to govern their own children and families using approaches grounded in their own cultures and tradition. The safety and well-being of First Nations children are paramount. First Nations children's cultural identities, connections to their communities, kinship ties and attachments to their families must be supported and preserved. Going forward, we commit to take measures that are informed by the principled framework.

We seek to achieve: meaningful reconciliation in the caring of First Nations children and youth; to support First Nations exercise of self-governance and jurisdiction in the manner they choose with regard to the well-being of their children, youth and families; and to clarify the relationship between First Nations, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada.

In so doing, we aim to:

- drastically reduce the number of First Nation children in care;
- prevent First Nations children from going into care;
- prioritize kinship and permanency placements where care is appropriately required;
- support First Nations youth to successfully transition out of care; and
- achieve family reunification and preservation.

MUTUAL COMMITMENTS

We hereby commit to work in partnership and take specific and concrete actions to advance reconciliation. We commit to a robust tripartite, partnership process to achieve First Nations child and family welfare reform whereby we:

- 1) Share a common vision of First Nations child and family well-being that promotes positive outcomes, connected families and healthy communities, and is delivered through culturally appropriate approaches and relevant programs and services that are developed collaboratively in response to needs identified by First Nations;
- 2) Maintain an engaged and transparent political process and relationship, based on mutual respect and recognition, to provide leadership and direction for sustained and measurable progress on concrete actions based on the principled framework, and to facilitate and support First Nations in exercising self-governance and jurisdiction, with regard to First Nations children, youth and families well-being; and
- 3) Establish a tripartite working group of Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council with an appropriate terms of reference, to implement the concrete actions to support and seek, as appropriate:
 - a) Legislative reform;
 - b) Policy and program development; and
 - c) An effective fiscal model to support First Nation child welfare in BC.

The Reconciliation Charter is a high-level, long-term and serious political commitment by the three parties. It will go into effect once signed. A Tripartite Working Group of Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council will determine a work plan with short, medium and long term objectives. The work plan will be revisited at a minimum once per year.

In witness whereof, the parties have signed this Reconciliation Charter in the Province of British Columbia.

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA:



The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

APR 04 2017

Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA:



Stephanie Cadieux, Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development

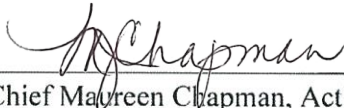


John Rustad, Minister, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

2017/04/07

Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:

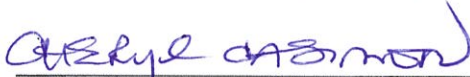


Chief Maureen Chapman, Acting Regional Chief

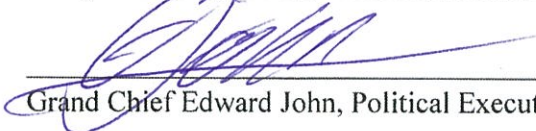
2017/04/07

Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT:



Cheryl Casimer, Political Executive Member



Grand Chief Edward John, Political Executive Member

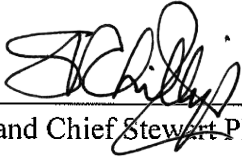


Robert Phillips, Political Executive Member

2017/04/07

Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS:



Grand Chief Stewart Philip, President



Chief Bob Chamberlin, Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer

2017/04/07

Date (YYYY/MM/DD)