

Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day Statement: Eliminating Sexist Elements in the Indian Act is Not the Answer; Dismantling the Indian Act is the Solution

(TORONTO, May 12, 2017) “As the Senate of Canada currently debates proposed changes to eliminate sexism in the Indian Act, the simple solution is to begin dismantling this colonial, racist, oppressive piece of legislation. In 1876, the federal government effectively stripped First Nations of our inherent and Treaty rights with the passage of the Indian Act, transferring all power over our daily lives to bureaucrats in Ottawa.

“In 1867 -- 150 years ago – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined a new Confederation called Canada. In order to expand the country westward, the Indian Act was unilaterally imposed to effectively steal our lands. Our Peoples signed Treaties with the intent to share the lands and resources equally with the new Canadians.

We did not expect to be exiled to reserves. We did not expect to be placed under the power of Indian agents, who controlled when and where we could leave our tiny parcels of land. We did not expect to be subjected to forced assimilation and cultural genocide.

How do we end this shameful, oppressive, racist system once and for all? The most comprehensive answers and recommendations have been with us for over 20 years. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) recommended replacing the authority of the Indian Act with Indigenous self-government and self-determination as recognized by international laws and UNDRIP. RCAP recommended that Indian Affairs be replaced with two departments: One department to help implement self-government, and one to provide services until all communities were self governing and self-sufficient.

How do we begin this dismantling process? The Assembly of First Nations and the federal government will soon be signing a Bilateral Accord. There must be a clause in the Accord that those RCAP recommendations be implemented within the next several years. The new Cabinet Working Group reviewing all policies and legislation that impact our Peoples must also provide a plan on how to effectively dismantle the Indian Act.

We have found the truth, now it is time to reconcile. Reconciliation starts with the abolition of the Indian Act and replacement with a shared jurisdiction that respects our inherent right to self-govern and have decision-making autonomy over lands and resources. A formal agreement to dismantle the Indian Act should be the only reason for our Peoples to recognize Canada 150. Our celebration should be about an opportunity and a time to reconcile this country's only race-based law.”

The Chiefs of Ontario is an advocacy forum, and a secretariat for collective decision making, action, and advocacy for the 133 First Nation communities located within the boundaries of the province of Ontario, Canada.

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