

Suggested Key Messages for INAN's Study of Land Restitution to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Communities

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

- Thank you for having me.
- The restitution of land is a deeply important part of Reconciliation. A strong connection to our land is part of the values that define who we are as Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- According to a study released 2 months ago by the Environics Institute, 81% of Canadians see inadequate Indigenous control over their lands and resources as a barrier to reconciliation.
- More and more Canadians are seeing the need for Indigenous communities to have more jurisdiction over their traditional territories. Canada's UNDRIP action plan speaks of reconciliation as a strategy to implement UNDRIP.
- Main point: However, we need to understand, the transfer of land alone will not bring improvements to our communities. Canada must be prepared to invest resources in Indigenous led responses to managing our traditional territories. We will need to support to building capacity in our communities and increasing Indigenous jurisdiction over our traditional lands. The public service needs to facilitate, support, and help with this transfer to Indigenous communities.
- I often asked FMB staff to keep an image in their minds: a young girl growing up on a norther, remote First Nations reserve. How does our work improve her life and help her to fulfill her dreams and goals, and the dreams and goals of her community?
- **You can't develop healthy and sustainable Indigenous communities, in keeping with UNDRIP, unless we have land and jurisdiction over it. You need to be recognized as a government with the appropriate powers and fiscal capacity.**
- **In the few minutes I have, here are a few things I want the Committee to consider.**
 1. First Nations increasingly looking to expand their communities to respond to growing populations and new opportunities.
 - IE: Irregular borders of Attawapiskat, a situation where one home may be on the reserve but not the space on either side. They are simply out of space to construct homes to meet the need.

2. Need for a focus on expanding Indigenous reserves to drive development, particularly in major centres like Ottawa and Toronto.
 - IE: Squamish Nations' Senákw Development off the Burrard Street Bridge; & Long Plain First Nations' hotel near the Winnipeg airport.
 - Look at joint-reserves owned by multiple First Nations who have formed new aggregations.
 3. The impact of a changing climate on Indigenous communities, including Nations forcibly relocated to land that Canada didn't want.
 - IE: Peguis First Nation in Manitoba evacuated from a flood plain nearly every year. Residents continue to be unable to return home after serious flooding in 2022.
 4. There needs to be consideration of the need for food security, including agriculture, hunting, and fishing.
 5. Federal government has a goal of protecting 30% of lands & water by 2030.
 - This must be done with serious consultations with First Nations, and in a way that doesn't impede economic progress as many other top-down, government-driven initiatives have done since Confederation.
 - Opportunities exist for some Nations to add land that they could then steward for biodiversity and carbon credits as a source of revenue for their community.
 6. The federal government's ATR program is top-down and process-heavy and driven by internal assumptions that often clash with the needs of the communities. The government has an opportunity to support a fulsome shift to a First Nations-led approach, where communities are involved as partners at the earliest stages and not once decisions have been made or planned.
- **It is clear, we need land for our people, we need land to be able to develop revenue, we need land to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to the Canadian economy.**
- **Beyond that land only works for Nations if their First Nations governments have the capacity to manage their affairs and the jurisdiction over the land is clear and respected with the appropriate enforcement powers.**

- **We need the support from this government and governments in the future to build Indigenous capacity and jurisdiction to manage the lands in their traditional territories.**
- Without this , someone will be sitting here again in 20 years, raising these same challenges. And the young girl I mentioned will be grown and continue to face poverty from which she sees no way out.