



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS
Annual General Assembly – Questions & Answers
First Nations Languages Initiative

July 24-26, 2018

Q: What did the Prime Minister of Canada announce on December 6, 2016?

A: In response to years of advocacy and effort by First Nations to revitalize, protect and maintain their languages, the Prime Minister announced that the Government of Canada will co-develop legislation for the revitalization and recovery of Indigenous languages with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

Q: What does it mean to co-develop legislation? Who is involved?

A: The co-development process involves the National Indigenous Organizations: the Assembly First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and the Métis Nation (MNC). The federal government is involved through the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH). Members of each of these organizations have been meeting weekly.

The Canada, AFN, ITK, and MNC Working Group is tasked with developing the proposed legislation based on direction from their leaders, experts and communities.

The objective is to work collaboratively, transparently, and on a distinctions-basis to co-develop a national *First Nations, Inuit and Métis Languages Act* whose content will reflect the distinct geographic, political, legislative and cultural contexts impacting language revitalization, recovery, preservation, protection, maintenance and promotion.

Q: Why is legislation important to the revitalization and recovery of First Nations' languages?

A: The bill that will be co-developed with First Nations and introduced by the Government of Canada is intended to affirm Canada's commitment to recognize First Nations rights, especially First Nations languages. A *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages Act* would hold the government accountable for the past and ongoing harms to Indigenous languages and cultures. Legislation will ensure that

the Government of Canada has a legislated responsibility to provide adequate, sufficient, and predictable financial resources over the long term. Further it is intended that the legislation will contain mechanisms which support the full and meaningful implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration). First Nations will retain their rightful control over their languages. The government will have a responsibility to support First Nations efforts and initiatives to revitalize, protect and maintain their languages.

Q: What is the process for co-developing the Indigenous languages legislation?

A: The co-development process will include the following activities:

- Preparing and developing content for documents for the development and introduction of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages legislation;
- Preparing draft legislative content for inclusion in languages legislation;
- Addressing implementation requirements including policy, program, and services issues related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages which would be addressed through an implementation plan;
- Developing methodology on funding requirements and approaches related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages.

Q: What is the next step in the co-development process?

A: The Department of Canadian Heritage launched their own “Intensive Engagement Sessions” with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Canada on June 19, 2018. These sessions will run through August 31, 2018 and will build on the pre-engagement sessions held in the summer and fall of 2017. The intention of the intensive engagement is to present the work completed to date and solicit feedback to inform the development of proposed legislation before it is introduced in the House of Commons. Among the questions for further discussion is the TRC’s Calls for Action regarding the creation of a national First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages institution, and specifically an Indigenous Languages Commissioner. Other potential areas that have been identified as requiring further input from First Nations relate to funding methodology, and education aspects.

Q: What has the AFN done to ensure First Nations perspectives are reflected in this work?

A: In 2017, the AFN hosted Regional Engagement Sessions across the country:

- to inform First Nations leaders, speakers, language champions, and policy makers about the co-development process and opportunities to provide input into the *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages Act*.

More than 500 Elders, leaders, fluent speakers, Indigenous scholars and experts participated in these sessions. As a result of the AFN Engagement Sessions, a report was produced which summarized the outcomes of the discussions. It is clear that legislation must support the rebuilding of all Indigenous languages, from recovery, reclamation, revitalization, and maintenance, back to normalization.

The Principles derived from this Engagement Report were put forth in AFN Resolution 77/2017, *Support for Co-development Work on Indigenous Languages Act*, and passed at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in December 2017. These Principles inform the Principles agreed to at the co-development table which will be transformed into potential legislative content.

Q: There is a federal election in 2019 and that could mean a change in government. Is it possible to co-develop the Act so that it passes before the 2019 Federal Election?

A: Yes, the federal government continues to assert their intention to introduce the Bill into Parliament in Fall 2018, with completion of the legislative process before the October 2019 election.

Q: What reports and resolutions support the First Nations Languages Initiative?

A: This work has widespread support by First Nations leadership. The final report of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action include specific calls (13, 14, 15 & 16) on Indigenous language revitalization and was fully supported by the Chiefs-in-Assembly through Resolution 01/2015.

On December 11, 2007, at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 37/2007, *Support and Endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

On July 9, 2015, at the AFN Annual General Assembly, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 06/2015, *Revitalization of Indigenous Languages: Concrete Actions to Support Indigenous Language Teachers and Cultural Centres*. This resolution calls for the adequate resources for languages, collaboration with First Nations for new language revitalization mechanisms and to reaffirm the TRC Calls to Action.

On December 6, 2017, at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly, Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 77/2017, *Support for Continued Co-Development Work on the Indigenous Languages Act*.

Q: How do the Métis and the Inuit fit into the co-development process?

A: All the representative organizations - AFN, MNC & ITK - have their own separate bilateral co-development processes, as well as a Multilateral Working Group to work on common goals.

Q: Who can I contact at the AFN to get more information about the *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages Act*?

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