



# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

## PREPARATORY INFORMATION SESSION SUMMARY: CREATING A FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS LANGUAGES ACT

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### BACKGROUND

The co-development of a *First Nations, Inuit and Métis Languages Act* must ensure that Indigenous languages are revitalized, strengthened, maintained and promoted through consistent, adequate, sustainable and predictable support and funding.

This summary provides a suggested list of topics which could benefit from further discussion and clarification during the Department of Canadian Heritage's (DCH) Intensive Engagement Sessions. During the Assembly of First Nations' and the DCH's previous engagements with First Nations, participants highlighted these topics as areas that would benefit from further dialogue.

### ROLE OF LEGISLATION FOR RECONCILIATION

- Introduce tangible measures for reconciliation to address the harms caused by the Residential School system, as related to language.
- Take measures to safeguard culture and protect from cultural appropriation, including intellectual property.
- Address—on a government-wide basis—languages and culture issues where they impact housing, employment, education, child welfare, and health as they are intertwined. Languages are integral to First Nations way of being, including worldviews and ceremonies, and should be reflected in the multifaceted approaches to revitalization, including education.
- Clarifying what “revitalization, preservation, and promotion” means to First Nations.
- Restoring the Nation-to-Nation relationship and reaching meaningful reconciliation.

### EXAMPLES OF LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

- Recognize First Nation jurisdiction for languages law-making.
- The right for Indigenous Peoples to understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.
- The right to be served in one's language in government service institutions.
- The right for First Nations to establish and control their own educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
- The right to maintain, express, and freely develop First Nations cultural identity in all respects, including their languages.



- The right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of First Nations languages.
- The right to manifest, practice, develop and teach First Nations spiritual and religious traditions in their own distinct languages.
- The right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations First Nations histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
- The right to establish First Nations media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
- The right to learn one's Indigenous language regardless of age and residence.
- The protection of traditional knowledge as it may be applicable to First Nations languages.
- The right of parents to educate their children in their Indigenous languages, with the recognition that this education extends into the home, where language is naturally transmitted.

#### **POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS, ROLES AND SERVICES FOR INSTITUTIONS**

- **National:** National oversight, complaints investigation and troubleshooting, and building awareness and goodwill.
- **Regional:** Coordinate relationships with federal government departments and agencies, provincial and territorial ministries, post-secondary institutions, and First Nations cultural centers and languages organizations and associations; capacity building, guidance and support for local initiatives; standards and professional accreditation (including for Elders); and, advisory services. Regional organizations like the First Peoples' Cultural Council might serve as a successful model. Support should be provided for languages groups and organizations to share best practices and approaches for revitalization.
- **Commissioner:** Language Commissioners around the world, and within Canada, generally work to promote, preserve, and implement language rights. They serve to protect language rights through monitoring and investigating government compliance. Any five year review of legislation should be informed directly by Indigenous peoples as well.
- *Existing organizations engaged in language revitalization work must not be hindered in continuing their work due to the creation of a governing body.*

#### **ADDRESSING JURISDICTIONAL OVERLAPS**

- Ensure policies do not limit language revitalization efforts, e.g. age restrictions disqualifying (new) speakers from a language course appropriate to their level.
- Ensure First Nations government rights to make their own languages laws.
- The right to establish and control educational systems and institutions providing education in First Nations languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning, which could include immersion schools as



have proven successful for language revitalization in British Columbia First Nations. Innovation in teaching to inspire youth should be supported.

- Certification and accreditation standards and control should be determined by First Nations.
- Support for urban and non-status or non-affiliated First Nations to access languages funding and resources, including, but not limited to, courses and documentation both in friendship centres and online.
- Intergovernmental agreements with the federal government, provinces/territories, including supports for First Nations educational systems working with provincial schools and regulations and expanding language learning beyond provincially-regulated education jurisdiction.
- Encourage provinces/territories in providing additional resources to support Indigenous language revitalization. For example, the province of British Columbia announced \$50 million for Indigenous languages in the province's 2018 budget.
- Ensuring continuous access to language instruction regardless of age and place of residence (on- and off-reserve).
- Support First Nations-controlled language teacher training, learning materials, capacity building, infrastructure (buildings/physical spaces to use languages), and curriculum development, and solid working mechanisms to achieve fluency beyond relying solely on Elders who may be 70 years of age or older.
- The role of technology-based language learning practices, including enabling First Nations-controlled archiving, digitizing and recording of fluent speakers.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUNDING**

- All languages are in need and the multi-faceted approach will have to inform funding targets and investments, including Indigenous-informed accountability measures that enable First Nations in dedicating adequate funding to language revitalization activities and monitor the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts.
- Funding should be earmarked specifically for languages initiatives and programs. Criteria to receive funding must be clear and inclusive, e.g. developed language plan with success measures defined by First Nations.
- Distribute funding to entities which will or already have undertaken language planning.
- Distribute funding directly to First Nations governments through fiscal transfers.
- Transitional measures in regards to funding are needed now and before legislation is passed and the sunset of the Aboriginal Languages Initiative in 2020.