



Press release

For immediate release

Submission of the Report of the Auditor General of Canada on First Nations Child and Family Services

Confronted with the urgency to act, INAC only proposes new delays

Ottawa, Tuesday, May 6, 2008 – The Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL), Mr. Ghislain Picard, said that he was very satisfied with the results of the Auditor General's report, but added that he was very preoccupied the answers of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. In Chapter 4 of the report that was submitted this afternoon in Ottawa, the auditor examines the way in which the Department managed the First Nations Child and Family Services Program. According to Mr. Picard, "For more than ten years, we have been working tirelessly to show the Government that the money that they are spending for child and family services is almost completely devoted for child placements and very little is earmarked for prevention – where the need is most pressing. The funding serves only to purchase services from the province", declared Chief Picard.

The situation that was denounced today in the Report of the Auditor General of Canada clearly illustrates the extent to which the First Nations Child and Family Services program does not fulfil the genuine needs of the First Nations in Canada, and particularly those of the First Nations in Quebec. It must be specified that among First Nations, in several areas such as youth protection and family assistance, the funding stems from the Federal Government while the applicable standards are defined by each of the provinces. First Nations therefore find themselves in an untenable situation – wedged between two jurisdictions with distinct and incoherent regulations, without being able to act in a domain which concerns them at the highest level.

Moreover, this program establishes a basis for the funding of services in accordance with standardised regulations for the whole country. In Quebec, this causes the First Nations communities to not have the necessary means to provide prevention and support services to families in need, or to fulfil the demands of the Youth Protection Act regarding the accreditation process for their foster families or placement institutions. The Federal Government, in their last budget, announced a total amount of \$43 million to be allocated over a period of two years in order to provide preventive services in certain provinces, but it is still not known how much of this funding will be allocated to the First Nations of Quebec.

A fruitless process

On many occasions, First Nations have shared their needs to the Federal and Quebec governments. About 12 years ago, in 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples insisted on the will of Aboriginal peoples to take control over their youth protection services in order to adapt them in such a way as to reflect their own values. The Commission called for global funding that would replace the per capita allocations so that prevention services could be implemented among the families, while more resources could be earmarked for urban services.

In 1998, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) submitted to the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec* their report entitled "Telling it like it is." In this report, the FNQLHSSC demonstrated that the child and family services were inefficient when controlled by the governments, because they do not genuinely adapt their services to the unique context of First Nations. In this report, the focus was especially on the development of human resources who would be in charge of providing the services in the communities as well as on the establishment of community-based teams for youth protection.

According to Ms. Guylaine Gill, FNQLHSSC Executive Director: *"Up until now, despite our repeated efforts and other than a few isolated and limited actions, there have not been any major federal initiatives aiming to ensure that First Nations children and families receive treatment that is comparable to those obtained by the general Canadian population. In the meantime, since we do not have the means to take control, our communities risk losing many of their children who are being placed, for the most part, in non-Aboriginal families. In many cases, because of Quebec law, this separation becomes permanent."*

"This situation is unacceptable and must now change in a radical manner. Instead of creating new deadlines, the government must absolutely provide us with the means to keep our children in our communities – the process of assimilation has endured for long enough already", added Chief Picard.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador is the regional organisation that regroups the Chiefs of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

About the FNQLHSSC

The role of the FNQLHSSC is to assist the First Nations and Inuit of Quebec and Labrador communities and organisations in the defence, maintenance and exercising of their inherent rights in terms of health and social services, as well as to help them in the achievement and development of these programs.

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The gravity of the statistics

- For the past five years, 1404 First Nation children were placed annually out of a total population of 12 094 children.
- Of these 1404 children placed annually, 429 are aged 5 years old or less.
- They will have lived 189 036 days in placement for an average of placement of 9.5 months per child.
- The **average duration** for the placement of a First Nations child in Quebec has been approximately **9.5 months per year**.
- In Quebec, in **2002-2003**, First Nations children were **7 times** more placed outside of their families than among the Quebec children.
- It is estimated that in **2008-2009**, they will be **9 times** more likely to be placed and the disparity tends to increase at a rate of .33 per year.
- The most common causes for placements are directly related to poverty and a lack of local resources. It is also for these same reasons that the majority of placements take place outside of the child's cultural and social environment.