

*Our Languages are a gift from the Creator*

**Engagement Session on  
Indigenous Languages Legislation  
REPORT**



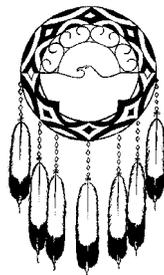
First Nations  
Confederacy  
of Cultural  
Education  
Centres

First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres  
Engagement Session on Indigenous Languages Legislation Report

Facilitator / Writer, Richard Powless

Writer / Editor, Claudette Commanda, LL.B. / J.D.  
FNCCEC Executive Director

Photographer, Ben Powless



The First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres acknowledges the Government of Canada for their financial support to host the FNCCEC Engagement Session on Indigenous Languages Legislation. This financial contribution enabled our member Cultural Centres from across Canada to gather collectively and share their unique expertise and to set forth recommendations on the promotion and protection of First Nation languages. We thank the Department of Canadian Heritage for their recognition and support of our First Nations community based knowledge keepers and language holders.

# FNCCEC

## Engagement Session on Indigenous Languages Legislation *REPORT*

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## PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

FNCCEC

ENGAGEMENT SESSION ON  
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES LEGISLATION



***First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres  
Engagement Session on Indigenous Languages Legislation Report***

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

*“Our Languages are a Gift from the Creator”*

In December 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the federal government’s plan on Indigenous Languages Legislation indicating this would be a partnership with the national Indigenous political organizations<sup>1</sup> to co-develop languages legislation. This co-development process involved engagement sessions separately organized by the Minister of Canadian Heritage as the government lead and the indigenous organizations for the purpose of First Nations, Inuit and Metis to provide their input on the legislation initiative.

The FNCCEC reached out to the Department of Canadian Heritage to offer its support for the proposed languages legislation and advocated for Cultural Centres to be included in the co-development on this legislation.

The Department of Canadian Heritage recognizes the well established expertise of the FNCCEC, and value of the organization’s language experts and champions to assist in the government’s work on languages legislation. The Department of Canadian Heritage supported FNCCEC’s request to deliver an engagement session for its membership.

The development of the Indigenous Languages Legislation requires extensive expertise of community based language experts, knowledge keepers, traditional knowledge holders, thus the FNCCEC membership of Cultural Centres possesses a wide array of language expertise in language program development, implementation, program and technical support, in essence, meeting the language and cultural needs of their communities. Hence, the expertise of Cultural Centres’ community based language work is beneficial for the development of languages legislation.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the FNCCEC held an engagement session with its member centres to discuss, share, organize and deliver recommendations essential to the Federal Government’s Call to Action on Indigenous Languages Legislation. The FNCCEC Engagement Session provided a forum for Cultural Centres to share their knowledge, experiences, opinions, concerns, best approaches and recommendations on the protection and promotions of their respective languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Metis National Council.

Twenty seven (27) Cultural Centres were represented totalling fifty seven participants<sup>2</sup> attending the FNCCEC Engagement Session. The participants of the FNCCEC Engagement Session were the directors, language instructors, Elders and youth of the member Cultural Centres.

The engagement session consisted of plenary and breakout sessions with the first day commenced by two (2) guest speakers delivering presentations to the plenary followed by a question and answer period. Throughout the course of two days, six (6) groups were assigned to eight (8) breakout sessions with twelve (12) questions to answer. The groups met at the end of day one and day two as a plenary to briefly share their reflections on the questions and the process. Day three, the final day, was dedicated to each group presenting their recommendations.

Following the overview of the agenda and meeting process by facilitator, Richard Powless; and, opening words on the purpose and intent of the FNCCEC Engagement Session by President, Morris Shannacappo and Executive Director, Claudette Commanda, the session began with presentations by Roger Jones representing Assembly of First Nations; and, Christina Buckshot representing Canadian Heritage.

#### *Presentation by Assembly of First Nations*

Roger Jones, Independent Consultant, provided a power point overview on the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) work to date on the co-development of the legislation.

The following is a summary of the key points of the presentation:

- the federal government has assured AFN that First Nations (along with Inuit and Metis organizations) would co-develop the legislation and the legislation will include revitalization, recovery, preservation, protection, maintenance and promotion of Indigenous languages
- the legislation will support the recommendations of the TRC Calls to Action and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- the legislation will consist of three distinct sections: First Nations, Inuit and Metis
- an important element of the legislation is the right and ability of First Nation governments to make languages law based on the recognition of a pre-existing rights
- the plan is to have the Indigenous Languages Bill introduced to Parliament in the Fall 2018 and passed before the next election scheduled for October 2019

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<sup>2</sup> Fifty four participants were members of the Cultural Centres; and, three participants were not members, these individuals were invited to attend by one of the cultural programs in Manitoba.

Participants were informed on the AFN's working group on languages which consists of the Chiefs Committee on Languages and Technical Committee on Languages.

Roger concluded his presentation by emphasizing that the legislation has not yet been drafted, and, AFN will be involved in the next phase of engagement sessions with Canadian Heritage. AFN will keep First Nations informed on the progress of the co-development<sup>3</sup>.

### *Presentation by Canadian Heritage, Indigenous Languages Legislation*

Christina Buckshot, Policy Analyst, provided an overview on the co-development legislation work by Canadian Heritage:

- commencing in June 2017, Canadian Heritage (PCH) conducted twenty engagement sessions with many language experts
- the engagements sessions were held in various areas across the country and also attended by Minister M. Joly and Parliamentary Secretary A. Virani
- the engagements session had two themes: 1) the best means to address preservation, revitalization and promotion; and, 2) addressing the TRC Calls for Action recommendations #13, #14 and #15
- Canadian Heritage engagement sessions heard opinions, concerns and recommendations similar to what AFN heard in their engagements sessions:
  - legislation needs to be protected by section 35 of the Constitution
  - funding must be adequate, sustained and reach local communities
  - one language commission is not enough, the commission must be a language-based representation
  - institutions, such as the language commission, must be Indigenous owned and serve a variety of functions
  - engagement sessions with local communities are fundamental because national indigenous organizations do not necessarily represent all communities or reflect the language needs at the community grassroots level

Canadian Heritage has not started any work on the drafting the legislation, they are presently working on the principles of the legislation. It is Canadian Heritage's plan to

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<sup>3</sup> Additional information is available at [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca)

introduce the legislation in the Fall 2018 with the intent to receive Royal Assent by September 2019.

Canadian Heritage is planning to conduct engagement sessions on a more intensive basis from late May to September 2018.

This engagement approach will involve two ways for Indigenous individuals and/or groups to provide their input on languages legislation: 1) Direct engagement which involves the actual attendance at a session; and, 2) Indirect engagement whereby individuals and/or groups can provide input by online submissions. The intent is to hold 2 or 3 sessions in each region. Individuals will be invited to these sessions.

Canadian Heritage is working with Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and Metis National Council (MNC) in organizing the May to September sessions. An information package will be sent to organizations and communities to provide context and invitation to participate in the direct and indirect engagement activities. The package will be sent to AFN, ITK, MNC, National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC), Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Pauktuuit Inuit Women of Canada, FNCCEC, and to other organizations such as Indigenous education and language entities, regional organizations, tribal councils, and communities (First Nation, Inuit and Metis).

Christina concluded her presentation by informing the participants that Canadian Heritage is currently co-developing a website with the three national organizations: Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and Metis National Council (MNC). The website will contain all necessary information concerning the direct and indirect engagements activities.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to ask questions. Five questions relating to funding, residency, provincial involvement and the working group were raised.

1. Will the legislation guarantee funding and how will the funding be distributed?
2. Will First Nations living in urban areas be included in an engagement session?
3. Will the provincial governments be included in the legislation?
4. Will First Nations have the opportunity to review the legislation once it is drafted?
5. Why is the FNCCEC not included in the AFN Working Group?

Both presenters provided responses to the questions indicating that funding is an essential element of the legislation. The funding must be adequate, predictable, sustainable, long term and must reach the appropriate recipients. The funding must be on a core-funding basis and not proposal or project based. The National Association of Friendship Centres will be organizing an engagement session for Indigenous people who reside in the urban areas, but more work is needed to deliver a better approach to reach First Nations who reside away from their home communities. Once the legislation is drafted, due to Parliamentary privilege regulation, only certain working group members will have access to review the drafted legislation.

A partnership approach with the provinces needs to be explored. FNCCEC can reach out to the AFN to put forward their request to be included in the AFN working group. Both presenters emphasized that the legislation has not yet been drafted. The findings and recommendations of the engagement sessions will feed into the drafting of the legislation.

The plenary presentations concluded with the Cultural Centre participants strongly expressing three fundamental 'asks': FNCCEC and Cultural Centres in each region must be invited to Canadian Heritage's direct engagement sessions; Cultural Centres must be included in the consultation phase once the legislation is drafted; and, FNCCEC must be included with full participation at the AFN working group. This was duly noted by both presenters.

### ***FNCCEC CALLS TO ACTION - KEY RECOMMENDATIONS***

The three day engagement session provided opportunity for Cultural Centres participants to discuss, organize and develop recommendations relating to their position on the proposed Indigenous Languages Legislation. Their long established expertise in language development, program delivery and community knowledge provided for insightful conversations in group and plenary discussions.

Cultural Centres' experiences along with the wisdom of the Elders and insights of the youth who also participated in the engagement session contributed to the strong recommendations put forward to support the FNCCEC in its goal to ensure the Cultural Centres are included in every step of the legislation development and implementation; and, to guide Canadian Heritage in its work on the drafting of languages legislation.

The FNCCEC Engagement Session produced twelve (12) recommendations. Five of the twelve recommendations are priority recommendations. Please see Section IV of this report for a thorough listing of the twelve recommendations.

## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Priority 1                      Distinction Based Language Legislation. Legislation cannot be a pan indigenous approach.
- Priority 2                      Funding must not be proposal or project driven. Funding must be legally protected, on a permanent basis and adequately resourced core funding for each First Nation community. Our languages must no longer be viewed or administered as ‘projects’.
- Priority 3                      First Nation communities must have ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP principles) on the implementation of the legislation, its regulations and language funding.
- Priority 4                      FNCCEC must be included in all aspects of the AFN and Canadian Heritage co-development plan including any subsequent engagement sessions and in the consultation phase.
- Priority 5                      FNCCEC must be given full participation in the co-development of the legislation, in the implementation of the legislation, and have a vital lead role in the Language Commission, and any program that is born out of the legislation.

The FNCCEC maintains its belief that all First Nation languages are endangered and must be protected. Cultural Centres advocate and work tirelessly for all First Nation languages to be revitalized, promoted and protected regardless of the level of fluency or strength of a language.

Cultural Centres expertise is integral to language protection, cultural health and in building strong cultural identity for children and youth. The work of Cultural Centres enriches community health and self esteem for First Nations youth.

The survival of languages and culture through the transmission of knowledge from elders to youth is the foundational work of our Cultural Centres.

FNCCEC and its member Centres support the Indigenous Languages Legislation. Despite the diversity amongst the Centres, nevertheless, there is a common theme on language protection and survival whereas Cultural Centres hold steadfast to their responsibility in ensuring that our children have their birthright: their language.

**“If we do not revitalize our languages, we lose the spirit of the people, we want to save our languages for the future survival of our next generations”**  
**Elder, Elmer Courchene**

*First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres*





## **PART II: REPORT**

**FNCCEC**

**ENGAGEMENT SESSION ON  
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES LEGISLATION**



## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

### ***Who we are, our vision, our mission, what we do***

*“It is the vision of the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres that we work collectively for the development of culturally and linguistically self-sustaining First Nation communities. Our mission is to advocate on behalf of our members, while creating awareness on the vitality of promoting, protecting and preserving our First Nations Languages and Culture”*

The First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres (FNCCEC) is a non-profit, national organization. Our unified voice leads in the promotion, protection, revitalization and maintenance of First Nations languages, cultures and traditions.

FNCCEC is comprised of fifty Cultural Centres which are located in every part of the country and represents the language and cultural diversity among First Nations. Our elders guide our work, and support our community base and national role as language advocates and language experts. The organization provides technical and program assistance to the Cultural Centres in their development and delivery of language and culture-based educational programs specific to their respective communities; and, we work collectively for the development of culturally and linguistically self-sustaining First Nation communities with the mission to advocate on behalf of our members, while creating awareness on First Nations languages and culture.

The FNCCEC was established in 1972 and incorporated in 1994, and consists of a Board of Governors with a representative from each province and territory who is duly appointed by his/her regional constituent centres; the President is elected by the membership. Elders have an essential role with the Board of Governors.

Our Cultural Centres represent over 300 First Nation communities nationwide. A recent statistical research conducted in 2017 by FNCCEC on the population of FNCCEC communities in comparable to the overall First Nation population in Canada concluded the FNCCEC’s national population is 421,838 <sup>1</sup> representing 43.31% of the total national population of 973,937 First Nation people in Canada<sup>2</sup>.

Cultural Centres have an active role in community based language program, whether it is in the education system or community affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> FNCCEC 2017, Cultural Centres National Statistics, Population & Demographics Report

<sup>2</sup> First Nations Profiles, [www.fnp-ppn.aandc-aadnc.gc.ca](http://www.fnp-ppn.aandc-aadnc.gc.ca)

In education, they serve as support for education related programs which include curriculum development for Band and provincial schools, teacher training, language classes, language acquisition, resource support to schools, presentations, workshops relating to the preservation of culture and language, life skills development, audio/visual resources, internet web pages and the production of materials for teachers, museums, archives, resource centres, libraries and post secondary schools.

For community, they develop and deliver community related programs and services covering a broad spectrum of activities such as summer camps, traditional sweat lodges and ceremonies, outdoor skills, cultural tourism, community language classes, traditional healing, protection of Elders teachings and traditional knowledge, adult language lessons, ceremonial and cultural celebrations, link contemporary technologies to traditional skills, and deliver cultural awareness programs to the public.

Not only does the FNCCEC play an important role in the preservation of traditional knowledge, archiving First Nation history and artefacts; it also has a vital role in reconciliation by ensuring the accuracy of First Nation history as it is told *by* First Nations *for* First Nations and in ensuring mainstream Canada learns *the real* history of Canada. History is integral to learning and appreciating the truth of Canada's past, and in building reconciliation. FNCCEC believes the promotion of First Nation cultural heritage is the path for healing, relationship building and fostering understanding and respect for First Nations people.

Cultural Centres function as ambassadors through the transmission of accurate accounts of First Nation history which nurtures bi-cultural awareness and addresses racism at its root. This is critical in an education and community context particularly in the age of technology and telecommunications.

In addition, Cultural Centres have been instrumental in utilizing technology to make First Nations language and culture current, dynamic and relevant to the children and youth of their communities. This is essential in a world of competing technology and social media.

The FNCCEC and its member centres have a significant impact nationally. They play a prominent and important role in collecting, documenting and preserving language and culture particularly in a context where many First Nation languages are critically endangered or on the verge of extinction.

Overall, the FNCCEC's expertise includes, but not limited to, language immersion, curriculum development, teachers training, historical archiving, curatorship, cross cultural awareness, networking, multimedia technology, language learning, fluent speakers acquisition, the collection and archiving of oral histories, production of

language resources; and, in addition to this pivotal expertise, the FNCCEC also inherited the duty of addressing the legacies of Indian Residential Schools, thus mandated to develop and deliver healing programs to meet the historical, cultural, social and educational needs relating to the loss of language and culture caused by residential schools. In essence, for the FNCCEC, in its beginning days, cultural revival was a priority issue to heal the effects of residential schools; and, in present day, priorities are language protection and fluent speaker acquisition.

### ***The Role of Cultural Centres in Languages Legislation***

In December 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the federal government's plan on Indigenous Languages Legislation whereas this would be a partnership with Indigenous political organizations<sup>3</sup> to co-develop language legislation. This co-development process involved engagement sessions separately organized by the Minister of Canadian Heritage as the government lead and the indigenous organizations for the purpose of First Nations, Inuit and Metis to provide their input on the legislation initiative.

The FNCCEC reached out to the Department of Canadian Heritage to offer its support for the proposed languages legislation and advocated for Cultural Centres to be included in the co-development on this legislation.

The Department of Canadian Heritage recognized the well established expertise of the FNCCEC, and valued the organization's language experts and champions to assist in the government's work on languages legislation. The Department of Canadian Heritage supported FNCCEC's request to deliver an engagement session for its membership.

The development of the Indigenous Languages Legislation requires extensive expertise of community based language experts, knowledge keepers, traditional knowledge holders, thus FNCCEC membership of Cultural Centres possesses a wide array of language expertise in language program development, implementation, program and technical support, in essence, meeting the language and cultural needs of their communities. Hence, the expertise of Cultural Centres' community based language work is beneficial in the development of languages legislation.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the FNCCEC held an engagement session with its member centres to discuss, share, organize and deliver recommendations essential to the Federal Government's Call to Action on Indigenous Languages Legislation. The FNCCEC Engagement Session provided a forum for Cultural Centres to share their knowledge, experiences, opinions, concerns, best approaches and recommendations on the protection and promotions of their respective languages.

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<sup>3</sup> Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Metis National Council.

Twenty seven (27) Cultural Centres were represented totalling fifty seven participants<sup>4</sup> who attended the FNCCEC Engagement Session. The participants of the FNCCEC Engagement Session were the directors, language instructors and elders of the member Cultural Centres.

The engagement session consisted of plenary and breakout sessions with the first day commenced by two (2) guest speakers delivering presentations to the plenary followed by a question and answer period. Throughout the course of two days, six (6) groups were assigned to eight (8) breakout sessions with twelve (12) questions to answer. The groups met at the end of day one and day two as a plenary to briefly share their reflections on the questions and the process. Day three, the final day, was dedicated to each group presenting their recommendations and vision for the future of our languages. The engagement session resulted in twelve recommendations inclusive of five priority calls to action.

Cultural Centres expertise is integral to language protection, cultural health and in building strong cultural identity for children and youth. The enrichment of community health and self esteem for First Nations youth depends on the transmission of knowledge from elders to youth; this is paramount reason why the survival of languages and culture is critical.

FNCCEC and its member Centres support the Indigenous Languages Legislation. Despite the diversity amongst the Centres, nevertheless, there is a common theme on language protection and survival whereas Cultural Centres hold steadfast to their responsibility in ensuring that our children have their birthright: their language.



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<sup>4</sup> Fifty four participants were members of the Cultural Centres; and, three participants were not members, these individuals were invited to attend by one of the cultural programs in Manitoba.

## **SECTION II: FNCCEC CULTURAL CENTRES**

Section II provides a broad overview of the various kinds of language and cultural activities of Cultural Centres in each region. The activities may be diverse and similar in nature, however, what is important to note are the activities developed and delivered by the Cultural Centres are indeed specific to the language and cultural needs of their respective communities.

Our member Centres work to reinforce the revitalization, promotion, protection of first languages, culture retention and traditional knowledge; and, to protect and support the well-being and identity of First Nations communities through the promotion and safe keeping of First Nation languages and culture.

Cultural Centres are community based grassroots delivery agents of programming for culture and languages initiatives. The requests for services filled by Cultural Centres at the local level continue to grow at tremendous rates.

Numerous reports produced by the FNCCEC, as well as the Cultural Centres' reports, highlight the past and present fundamental work on language revitalization, education support, and cultural education programming delivered by the Centres. The reports also illustrate the need for continuance of these programs, services and activities.

Furthermore, Cultural Centres have an active role in community based language program, they are responsible in producing a variety of resources including materials to support language and culture curricula, dictionaries/ grammar texts, publications aimed at various ages, periodicals and newsletters, oral histories, traditional knowledge, narratives, discourses, audio/visual resources, internet web pages and materials for museums, archives, resource centres, libraries and schools. In many instances, a Cultural Centre is the hub of the community.

In summary, the expertise of Cultural Centres encompasses a vast array of knowledge and skills that contribute to positive self-image and self-esteem, continuity with the past, a distinctive identity in the present and a legacy for the future.

Please see the following overview of activities for each region.

## **REGIONS – CULTURAL CENTRES – ACTIVITIES**

### **Prince Edward Island (PEI)**

Language(s): Mi'kmaq

The Cultural Centre in this region delivers a number of language and cultural activities such as: culture and drama program for children; youth cultural group; regalia making; treaty day celebration; community cultural gatherings; Elders' teachings on ceremonies and Mi'kmaq life skills; supporting school curriculum for the Band operated school and cultural awareness training and public outreach.

### **New Brunswick (NB)**

Language(s): Maliseet and Mi'kmaq

The Centres in this region deliver an array of activities such as cultural day camp for the youth during the summer months; Elders' teachings; cultural workshops; in-school language classes; adult language lessons; language curriculum development and language immersion program.

### **Nova Scotia (NS)**

Language(s): Mi'kmaq

In this region, the Centres deliver elders' teachings on culture, traditional knowledge and life ways; language classes; curriculum development; collection and archiving of stories; language resource development; cultural tourism; treaty day celebration to promote the proud history and culture of the Mi'kmaq people, and cross cultural training.

### **Quebec (QC)**

Language(s): Algonquin, Cree, Innu and Mohawk

In this region, the Cultural Centres are involved in language initiatives such as language fluency learning and retention; language training; educational curricula for use by communities and the public; language resource development; vocabulary handbook for community schools; exhibits and museum tours; cataloguing artifact collections; repatriation and protection of sacred cultural objects and materials; genealogy on families and communities; picture dictionary and audio recordings; life skills acquisition and traditional arts and crafts training; cultural education video productions; and, outreach workshops on cultural teachings.

**Ontario (ON)**

Language(s): Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Oneida

The Centres deliver a broad range of land based in-school and community culturally relevant activities. Land based cultural education programs are delivered to a number of elementary and high school students in northern Ontario such as language and cultural skills teachings. The Centres are also involved in producing books and teachers resources, dictionary development for schools and community use; indigenous studies and library resourcing; language proficiency courses for community members; language resource development for multimedia facets for language learning; online language learning; cultural knowledge keepers are provided to schools to teach students about culture and skills; language proficiency kits; language measurement tools; adult language learning and cultural workshops; medicine teachings; and cross cultural teachings.

**Manitoba (MB)**

Language(s): Cree, Dene, Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Sioux

The Centres in Manitoba are involved in community public library; seasonal cultural camps; language classes; teachings on cultural and life skills; elders' teachings on ceremonies and passages of life for youth; collection and archiving of historical records; land based education; teachings on medicines and harvesting; children's workshops on traditional teachings; traditional food teachings; artisans showcase; language and literacy program; cross cultural training for provincial schools and public outreach. Collection of oral histories and banking of traditional knowledge, and dictionary development are also a focus, as well as resource and library services to band operated and provincial schools and the public.

**Saskatchewan (SK)**

Language(s): Dakota, Denesuline, Lakota, Nakawē, Nakota, Plains Cree, Swampy Cree and Woodland Cree

Saskatchewan has only one cultural centre which is responsible to address all of the cultural and language needs for the entire region. The Centre serves 74 First Nations which comprises of eight (8) language groups in Saskatchewan. The Centre provides province wide services that include educational and community level activities. The Centre has numerous collections of educational, language and cultural resources and publishes annually additional resources and curriculum materials. The Centre also delivers other activities such as an annual language keepers conference, language instructor certificate program, language support community engagement program, languages linguistic strategy, keeping house initiative that comprises of museum, archives, library, and a research center, a repository for artifacts and sacred objects and protection of ceremonial grounds. The Centre is guided by an Elders' Council.

**Alberta (AB)**

Language(s): Blackfoot, Cree and Nakoda

The Cultural Centres in Alberta are involved in education through the provision of cultural studies programming within the schools and creating materials for First Nation and provincial level schools particularly for language development curriculum. In this region, the Centres have made significant strides in the development of curriculum for adult learners and for children from early years through secondary grades. They have also created resources for language instructors and have been involved in the production of language and cultural materials through collaborative efforts with local universities and other partners. Dictionary development; design and use of language apps; teacher training; historic sites protection; cultural studies; ceremonial teachings and cultural camps for youth; and, work in video archives documenting stories of Elders are other relevant language and cultural activities of these centres.

**British Columbia (BC)**

Language(s): Carrier, Hal'emeylem, Halq'emeylem, Heiltsuk, Hul'q'umi'num, Kwak'wala, Lil'wat, N'silxcen, Secwepem'c and Sencoten

The province of British Columbia contains a number of Centres that are situated in a variety of locations throughout the region. Some of these centres are part of Band operated cultural programs sometimes independently and at other times integrated within a number of different Band operated schools. Many of the Cultural Centres' activities focus on community engagement activities. They also conduct a significant amount of effort related to language preservation with children, youth and adults while providing cultural support at the community level. Centres are involved in curriculum development and the delivery of language instruction at the elementary and secondary levels, as well as the development of materials for post-secondary institutions and for adult learners in the communities. They are involved in the development of dictionaries and the provision of archival support to schools and their communities which includes publication production, language lessons, cultural teachings, language teachers' training, teachings on ecological knowledge, language and cultural archives and library, cultural initiatives resource development. They also provide library, museum and resource services to the communities targeted at language preservation, revitalization and promotion, and work closely with Elders and knowledge keepers.

## **Northwest Territories (NWT)**

Language(s): Dene

In this area, local schools depend on the Cultural Centre for curriculum development. Significant work is being conducted related to digital media applications for language learning in an effort to engage youth and fill the gap between tradition, cultural identity and modern technological innovations. The Cultural Centre provides language and cultural activities to five Dene communities in the region.

## **Yukon (YK)**

Language(s): Tlingit

The Centre delivers a land-based knowledge and skills cultural camp for children ages eight to fourteen years. Parents and knowledge keepers provide the cultural knowledge and life skills teaching in the Tlingit language.



### **SECTION III: GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The Engagement Session held a series of breakout sessions consisting of six groups of participants. Each group met to discuss specific questions relating to the proposed legislation. Each group had the same questions for discussion. The purpose of the group discussions was to garner opinions and recommendations from the Cultural Centres. Their participation in sharing their wisdom, insights and direction in the group discussions was immensely valuable and resourceful.

Section III provides a concise overall answer collected from the group discussions for each question.

**Question 1: RCAP, UNDRIP, and the TRC made recommendations on the protection, revitalization, and advancement of Indigenous languages. Which of the recommendations from these reports are a priority for you?**

The participants indicated their support for the key sections of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action sections dealing with Indigenous languages. In particular, Article 13 of the UNDRIP; and, Calls to Action #14, #15, #16, #17 and #45.

**Question 2: Do we want language legislation? If yes, what do we want to see in the legislation? If we do not want the language legislation, then how should our languages be protected and what are the assurances we need for the protection and promotion of our languages?**

The Cultural Centres stated support for the legislation. Language legislation is needed; however, the legislation must not be lengthy and complicated, but rather, a concise legal description explicit with the recognition of First Nations to have the right to enact their own language laws. Some participants indicated the legislation should have official language status similar to the French and English languages. Despite support for the legislation, participants voiced concern and skepticism on the government's engagement process, such as, some believed that a draft version of the legislation has been done and the engagement sessions with First Nations are only a formality.

Other opinions for this question included the need for remediation for damages done to ancestral languages; emergency measure to protect languages and prevent further language loss are needed and funding is an urgent and priority need; more consultation and clarity on the legislation at the grassroots level needs to occur; traditional

knowledge and protocols need to be included in the legislation; language rights need to be constitutionally protected; and the legislation should be only for the protection of languages but not to legislate First Nations languages – participants indicated that First Nations must always have ownership and control of their languages.

**Question 3A: Once the legislation is passed, what are the components of a structure that are needed to support language revitalization in the communities, for example a foundation, council, commissioner, institute, other?**

Participants identified several existing models to serve as possible structures, such as cultural language programming across school boards which provide for on and off reserve community members; First Nations post-secondary institutions that have partnerships with First Nation education authorities and Cultural Centres. Participants also identified existing Language Teacher programs to train new teachers and immersion language programs which can be utilize for further development and/or creation of programs for communities. In addition, new structures or processes are needed such as a national language inventory as a means to be informed on what First Nations across Canada are doing to restore or protect their languages; the establishment of a traditional knowledge based language authority and framework; development of Master and Apprentice program to create fluent language teachers and speakers; and, creation of a national First Nation language institution which will represent all First Nations people and each Nation having a council body specific to its language within this institution.

**Question 3B: Do you have any examples of regional structures that support First Nation languages? If so, what do they do and how do they work?**

Several existing regional structures were identified: First Peoples' Culture Council (BC); First Nations Education Society (MB), Mamawininee (QC), MICEC (MB), Turtle Lodge (MB), Indigenous Higher Learning Association (AB). It was noted that there are many other regional structures across Canada in addition to those identified in the group discussions, such as First Nations Education Steering Committee, and regional radio / broadcasting outlets. These various structures provide a variety of support for languages such as curriculum development, resource materials, project funding, mentor apprentice program, multimedia technology for language learning, library and archives resources, language training, cultural awareness, language translation services, linguistics, adult language lessons, in-school language delivery, land based education, immersion schools, implementation and administration of education systems, support for school boards, and delivery of cultural education programs.

Publishing companies such as Theytus Books were identified as a mechanism that supports languages.

Importantly, Cultural Centres were identified for their long established work on languages and they must be recognized for their community work and in raising the awareness on the critical need for language promotion and protection. Cultural Centres serve the cultural education needs of their communities and continue to advocate for language survival. Cultural Centres work in conjunction with other community institutions sharing curriculum and books such as dictionaries, language apps, translation services, orthography and sharing of best practices. Cultural Centres are the best vehicle for language delivery.

Participants also stated that the FNCCEC has a fundamental role in supporting First Nation communities across Canada. It was strongly stated "*we do not accept another structure other than the FNCCEC to support our languages and communities.*"

**Question 3C: How can those who do not reside in their home communities be supported? Are there structures in urban centres that can be supported or developed to serve this population?**

Friendship Centres and post secondary institutions were identified as urban resources to provide language support for First Nations who do not reside in their home communities. Some Friendship Centres do provide language learning, resource materials, curriculum and educational programming in conjunction with Cultural Centres. Other examples identified were the Vancouver Native Education Centre which was created to be an urban post-secondary institution and the Simon Fraser University which serves seventeen different bands of the Shushwap Nation by offering a fully credited language course. It was also noted that there are other post secondary institutions which provide online language lessons.

It was mentioned there are times when First Nations education authorities can allocate resources for cultural education to off-reserve schools. It was suggested that the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Association is a possible vehicle to deliver language programming to the urban First Nation population. Most notably, there was a common opinion across the groups whereby they stated regardless where the existing structures are located or how they deliver language programming, there must be separate funding for urban language resources. Existing and any new funding for language programming cannot be taken away from First Nation communities to support urban structures.

**Question 4A: How should the legislation be implemented and who will oversee the regulations of the legislation?**

It was strongly voiced that FNCCEC be the governing body for the implementation of the regulations given the organization is community based and grassroots driven with expertise in policy, program development and delivery, technical support and services; and for over four decades its members are holders of the knowledge, elders, language experts and language speakers. The FNCCEC is national with the strength to focus and support local priorities.

It was also said that the legislation needs to be grounded in ceremony in the same way the treaties were done. And, the elders and ceremonial keepers must be integral to the development and implementation of the legislation.

Importantly mentioned is legislation and its regulations cannot be another bureaucracy of government, nor should the legislation be in the control of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) national political organization or any other political organization.

The legislation must be distinction based and implemented accordingly to First Nations protocols, perspectives and practices.

What is needed is a collective effort and collaboration between First Nation communities, the Federal Government, policy and lawmakers for the drafting and implementation of the legislation, and whereby First Nation led post secondary and education authorities need to be an integral part of this process.

Participants also stated that the legislation must be standardized in a way that accommodates the rights and protocols of all First Nations across Canada, for example, to be inclusive of treaty and non treaty First Nations.

There was an opinion offered that if the Federal Government appoints AFN as the entity to oversee the legislation, then, the AFN must include representatives from major language-delivery bodies such as the FNCCEC, the Cultural Centres, First Nation led post-secondary institutions, community-based language authorities and/or First Nation controlled school boards.

**Question 4B: Who will determine the implementation, governance and administration of the legislation and its regulations?**

Overwhelmingly stated First Nations should determine the implementation, governance and administration of the legislation and its regulation. At the very least is should be a combined effort with community based First Nations leaders and the federal government.

Participants strongly stated that the national entity FNCCEC who represents the grass roots community people be the lead on overseeing the regulations in partnership with a First Nation Language Commissioner. The Cultural Centres would like to see the creation of a Language Institute to serve in the capacity as support for the administration of the legislation. This language institute would be under the umbrella of FNCCEC; and, FNCCEC to be involved in the appointment of a language commissioner.

**Question 5A: How will funding be guaranteed and protected by legislation?**

It was a unanimous position of all the groups that any funding must not be proposal or project driven. Funding must be core funding adequately resourced with every First Nation community across Canada to have guaranteed access to this funding. The Cultural Centres strongly stated that First Nations should never be put in a compromising position to compete against one another for language funding. It is imperative that the Federal Treasury Board authorize a separate funding envelope for Indigenous languages; and, language funding must be constitutionally protected. Furthermore, language rights and the right to Indigenous languages must be protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Participants stated they would like to see the funding managed by the FNCCEC because of its national structure in governance and sound administration of program funding. Any funding source from legislation should not be managed by band councils but rather the program experts such as the Cultural Centres.

It was also noted that Canada should declare Indigenous languages as official languages for this will strengthen communities' position for funding. Furthermore, it was also noted that provinces as well as the federal government have a responsibility to provide a level of funding for language programming to First Nations.

**Question 5B: What are the kinds of funding that should flow from the legislation?**

There is an assortment of suggestions covering a full range of language needs such as funding for: lifelong learning, curriculum development, teacher training, language fluency, elders and cultural knowledge keepers support, preservation of language, language centres, summer schools, immersion programs, cultural centres; and, infrastructure and human resource capacity.

There are other kinds of funding needed: for immediate emergency measures; for language loss; to support community based language assessment to study the level of language fluency and/or the health of language; an endangered language fund must be established to support the extinction of languages and to build language health.

Funding should also include land based education not only in school settings or during a school year, but also summer school immersion programming, and to support language nests.

Funding is needed for infrastructure capacity to build language institutes, language nests and language centres. Funding is needed to support existing institutions such as FNCCEC and Cultural Centres to enhance their capacity and resources. The funding that will flow from the legislation must enhance any existing funding of Cultural Centres. In essence, languages legislation funding must be new monies rather than an aggregate of existing monies that support current language programs, such as Cultural Education Centres Program and Aboriginal Languages Initiative.

Importantly, funding must be permanent to support communities in their ongoing language development and diversity must be taken into considerations. All First Nations communities across Canada are concerned for the protection, revitalization and maintenance of their languages, however, they are diverse in the level of needs, best practices, solutions and mechanisms, hence, funding is needed to support language innovation of each community.

**Question 5C: What is the funding level we will seek and recommend?**

It was emphasized that First Nations should never be put in a compromising position in having to compete against one another for language funding. All First Nation communities must have access to adequate resourced funding regionally equitable. Funding cannot go to political organizations. Funding must be provided directly to the communities or to non political, not for profit organizations that are community focused and grassroots driven.

The amount of \$250 million was recommended as a starting base for a First Nations language institute, and this funding to be increased on an annual basis. Each community be given A-Base core funding with guaranteed annual increases indexed to inflation and community needs – this core funding is separate from any monies set aside for the language commissioner or language institute, and, is separate from additional funding.

A-base funding is needed for capacity development in capital infrastructure and human resources. In addition to A-base funding, communities must receive additional dollars to develop and deliver language programs and services.

Participants stated that language funding must be legally protected and guaranteed in the same manner as the two ‘official languages’ as English and French, and funding cannot be any less than the amount given to these two languages. It was passionately stressed that First Nation languages are the original languages of Canada and given the

historical truth of Canada's deliberate attack to annihilate our languages through legal policies and actions; therefore, much work is needed to repair and revitalize languages, thus the need for long term adequate funding to enhance and/or develop sustainable language programs.

First Nation languages must be compensated adequately with population and demographics taken into consideration, as well as, the level of language loss in the communities. Measures are needed to assess the amount of funding required to address the language loss and rebuild languages. Funding will help to develop programs for ongoing language promotion from one generation to the next.

**Question 6: What other concerns and priorities do we have with language legislation, including Ownership of our Languages and Culture; Inherent and Treaty Rights; Core Funding or Proposal Funding?**

Several priorities were identified in the answers provided by the groups. Overall, there was the common theme whereby strongly stated is the inclusion of elders and support for elders in the pursuit of language protection, promotion and revitalization in the communities, and in any other areas where language work is conducted.

Other priorities included the need for healing to deal with language loss resulting from residential school trauma; the need to train service providers such as language teachers, teachers, and social workers on cultural protocols; inclusion of elders and knowledge keepers when working with communities and individuals; the need for funding to develop and deliver land based education, to provide in-school education to children in their respective language, to provide children with access to learning ceremonial teachings by using their language; and, resources development for language learning of all ages, including adults and elders.

The issue of intellectual property and copyright protection based on the OCAP principles (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) was identified as a priority whereby to ensure that First Nation knowledge, which includes language and culture is protected, and it is First Nations who own our languages. Our languages do not belong to any government, institution or society. The ownership of language and culture includes stories, books, archives and any kinds of work produced and stored for present and future use.

Safe guarding data is another priority. It is important to protect information by way of digitization of written and audio materials, and having a suitable location to store the data for safekeeping and accessibility.

A priority mentioned is the need to have First Nation languages constitutionally protected and as a fiduciary responsibility of government.

Another priority emphasized is the need for governments and society to recognize and respect the uniqueness of First Nation languages and to recognize the distinctions between First Nations languages and the Metis and Inuit languages.

It was emphasized that funding cannot be proposal driven, piece meal funding. Core funding is imperative. The legislation must guarantee permanent adequately resourced core funding with annual increases and every community to access funding on an annual basis for language development and enhancement. It was stressed that Cultural Centres and communities currently have project driven funding, but due to the lack of core funding, they cannot plan or engage in future language development.

**Question 7: What would you like to see happen next with this issue? What are the next steps and follow up you would like to see?**

A number of key points were put forward by the Cultural Centres' participants relating to next steps.

The participants overwhelmingly stated it is imperative for FNCCEC to have ongoing involvement at the highest levels in this process and as a key part of the AFN - Canada Co-development Working Group, including the AFN Technical Committee on Languages. A letter from the FNCCEC President is to be sent to the Prime Minister, Minister of Canadian Heritage and AFN National Chief calling for FNCCEC to have full participation at these critical tables.

Participants were clear on the need for ongoing communication from Canadian Heritage and AFN on the step by step progress of the legislation development, and information on Canadian Heritage's next engagement phase and on the consultation process.

Cultural Centres expect to be included in the consultation sessions once the legislation is drafted in order for the FNCCEC to have the opportunity to give their input on the contents of the draft legislation.

Participants stated that once the legislation is drafted, there is a need to hold another FNCCEC engagement session with the same individuals who attend this engagement session for the purpose to review and discuss the draft legislation.

Participants observed that the FNCCEC Engagement Session was the most informative and most effective of all engagement sessions held thus far. They felt they need to take this information back to their communities.

The next steps for the participants is they will share a copy of the FNCCEC Engagement Session Final Report with their Band Councils as a means to educate the leaders on the importance of language protection, the goal of the language legislation and the vital role that Cultural Centres and the national organization FNCCEC have with language protection and protection, and, to garner support from their leadership to advocate for FNCCEC to be the lead on the implementation and administration of the legislation, and to be delegated the First Nations Language Commission.



## Section IV: RECOMMENDATIONS – CALLS TO ACTION

*“We need to develop our own languages laws as nations”<sup>5</sup>*

The FNCCEC and its member Centres continue to believe and hold steadfast to their position that there is a need for legislation to protect and support our languages as an assurance for our communities to have the tools to protect, preserve, promote, practice their respective ancestral languages, and to have the right to educate our children in their ancestral language. The Cultural Centres continue to lobby for languages legislation through the support of the Elders, community members, and the national organization, FNCCEC.

During our engagement session, the Cultural Centres spoke passionately about the need for the first and original languages of Canada to be protected, revitalized and maintained. Time is of the essence for the sake of our children and future generations to have access to their language and culture from birth throughout life, and the ability to transmit their languages to the next generations. Creator gave us our languages to communicate with one another, with our ancestors, with the spirits, with the land and all of creation. Our languages are a gift from the Creator. Not only it is First Nations responsibility, but it is also Canada’s responsibility to ensure First Nations children have the right to their ancestral languages.

This section highlights the recommendations of the FNCCEC concerning the Indigenous Languages Legislation. Twelve (12) recommendations were produced from the group discussions and plenary sessions. Five of the 12 recommendations are priority recommendations.

- Recommendation 1: Distinction Based Legislation and Implementation<sup>6</sup>
- Recommendation 2: Funding must be distinction based, legally protected, permanently guaranteed, adequately resourced as core funding for First Nation communities, and language funding must be separate from education funding
- Recommendation 3: First Nation communities must have control of the implementation of the legislation and all funding flowing from the legislation
- Recommendation 4: Funding must not be proposal or project driven
- Recommendation 5: FNCCEC must be part of the AFN National Working Group<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stated by Cultural Centre participant of FNCCEC Engagement Session.

<sup>6</sup> The legislation must not be pan approach. The legislation must have a separate distinction for First Nation, for Inuit and for Metis.

- Recommendation 6: Canadian Heritage must guarantee the involvement of FNCCEC in its planned Direct Engagements Session; and, in the Consultation Phase of the draft legislation<sup>8</sup>
- Recommendation 7: The Language Commission and Language Commissioner must be distinction based and FNCCEC must be involved in the appointment/selection of a First Nation Language Commissioner (s); and the FNCCEC must have a lead role in the establishment, implementation and activities of the Language Commission
- Recommendation 8: The legislation must not derogate or abrogate but rather protect the Treaties.
- Recommendation 9: Inclusion of Elders and Youth in Language Development<sup>9</sup>
- Recommendation 10: The Co-development Working Group must establish direct communication with the Cultural Centres on the progress of the languages legislation<sup>10</sup>
- Recommendation 11: The Government of Canada to involve FNCCEC in the public outreach work or consultation process that is needed to educate Canadians on the reasons why the Indigenous Languages Legislation is important and why Canadians must support the protection and promotion of First Nation languages
- Recommendation 12: The Government of Canada to support the FNCCEC in its community based and national work in promoting and protecting First Nations languages and in raising awareness on the importance of First Nation languages

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<sup>7</sup> FNCCEC and its member Cultural Centres have a long established expertise in language promotion and development; therefore, it is imperative for FNCCEC to be included in the co-development of the legislation by having full participation with the AFN – Canadian Heritage working group; and also with the AFN Chiefs Committee on Languages and Technical Committee on Languages.

<sup>8</sup> This recommendation speaks to the need for Canadian Heritage to include FNCCEC in its direct engagement sessions; and to hold a consultation session directly with FNCCEC.

<sup>9</sup> This recommendation addresses the need for Elders and youth to be integral in the development of the legislation, and also in any community based or national language programs to be developed from the legislation.

<sup>10</sup> Cultural Centres call for a communication plan to be developed whereby they will continue to be informed on the planning and progress work of the legislation in order for the Cultural Centres to inform their leaders and community members about the legislation.

## ***PRIORITY CALLS TO ACTION***

A noteworthy mention are the five (5) priority calls to action recommendations of the Cultural Centres.

- Priority 1                      Distinction Based Language Legislation. Legislation cannot be a pan indigenous approach.
- Priority 2                      Funding must not be proposal or project driven. Funding must be legally protected, on a permanent basis and adequately resourced core funding for each First Nation community. Our languages must no longer be viewed or administered as ‘projects’.
- Priority 3                      First Nation communities must have ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP principles) on the implementation of the legislation, its regulations and language funding.
- Priority 4                      FNCCEC must be included in all aspects of the AFN and Canadian Heritage co-development plan including any subsequent engagement sessions and in the consultation phase.
- Priority 5                      FNCCEC must be given full participation in the co-development of the legislation, in the implementation of the legislation, and have a vital lead role in the Language Commission, and any program that is born out of the legislation.



## SECTION V: CONCLUSION

*“The creator gave us everything that we need, Creator gave us our languages to connect to the land and to our ceremonies, we need our languages”<sup>11</sup>*

Cultural Centres have a significant impact nationally. They play a prominent and important role in collecting, documenting and preserving language and culture particularly in a context where many First Nation languages are critically endangered or on the verge of extinction. The expertise of Cultural Centres encompasses a vast array of knowledge and skills that contribute to positive self-image and self-esteem, continuity with the past, a distinctive identity in the present and a legacy for the future. Cultural Centres preserve the traditional language and life ways of their people today and for future generations.

The FNCCEC maintains its belief that all First Nation languages are endangered and must be protected. Cultural Centres advocate and work tirelessly for all First Nation languages to be revitalized, promoted and protected regardless of the level of fluency or strength of a language.

The FNCCEC and its member cultural centres are guided by the wisdom and strength of our elders. Our elders teach us that the ancestral language of our people gives us spirit. Language is our identity. Language is the soul of our people. Language is the essence of the wholeness of our being and vital for strong and healthy community life.

As stated by Ojibway Elder, Elmer Courchene "if we do not revitalize our languages, we lose the spirit of the people, we want to save our languages for the future survival of our next generations". The FNCCEC diligently upholds this responsibility to reinforce the revitalization, promotion, protection of first languages, culture retention and traditional knowledge; and, to protect and support the well-being and identity of First Nations communities through the promotion and safe keeping of our languages and culture. Collectively, since the inception of the cultural education centre's movement forty five years ago, Cultural Centres continue to work on the development of culturally and linguistically self-sustaining First Nation communities.

As rights holders of our languages, the FNCCEC and its member cultural centres understand the need for languages legislation. Legislation that will guarantee endowed financial support for communities to develop immediate and long term sustainable solutions to protect, preserve, promote, practice ancestral languages, and to educate their children in their ancestral language. The Cultural Centres will maintain their steadfast work in lobbying for languages legislation through the support of the Elders, community members, and the national organization FNCCEC, to ensure our children have their inherent birth right, treaty right and human right to their identity, language and culture, forever more.

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<sup>11</sup> Cody Courchene, The Turtle Lodge, Sagkeeng, Manitoba.

It is our expressed desire that the FNCCEC Engagement Session Final Report supports the Government of Canada's work on addressing the protection of Indigenous languages, and that the FNCCEC Calls to Action recommendations on Indigenous Languages Legislation will be taken into account and applied in the development and implementation of the legislation.

The FNCCEC submits its report in honour of our ancestors and our children, and draw on the eloquent words of FNCCEC President, Morris J. Swan Shannacappo "in the spirit of *reconcili-Action* let us wisely heed to the wisdom and guidance of the Elders to ensure First Nations children and their descendants will always have their ancestral languages, cultures and heritage forever more".

We sincerely thank the Assembly of First Nations for facilitating the participation of Roger Jones to provide our Cultural Centres with an overview on the AFN Engagement Sessions and co-development work.

We also acknowledge and sincerely thank the Government of Canada for the financial support to host the FNCCEC Engagement Session on Indigenous Languages Legislation for our member Cultural Centres from across Canada; and, sincerely thank the Department of Canadian Heritage for their recognition of First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres as language experts, and for their support of our national role in languages promotion and protection.

***RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED***

***First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres***

**“Our languages are the first voices of the land. Our languages are the original languages of Canada. We must ensure that our languages are protected for sake of our children to continue to be the first voices of this country”**

**Morris J. Swan Shannacappo, FNCCEC President**

*First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres*



**Our mission is to advocate on behalf of our members while creating awareness on the vitality of promoting, protecting and revitalizing our First Nation Languages and Culture**

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