



The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, PC, MP
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs
The House of Commons
K1A 0A6

April 7, 2016

Minister Bennett:

We write to express our appreciation for the significant and long-overdue commitments to Indigenous Education in the recent budget announcement. As you may recall, the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue has been following this file with great interest and concern for some time. The journey of reconciliation is a long climb and these budget commitments are good steps on the way. We know that fulsome reconciliation in Indigenous education systems will require long-term commitment and creativity, significant political will and public support. In this session of Parliament, and certainly in the coming years, we are eager to walk along -side Indigenous communities and leaders and Parliamentarians to encourage implementation of TRC Calls to Action 7-10. In that spirit we hope for ongoing dialogue with you and your colleagues on these imperatives of reconciliation in Indigenous education. We are eager to discuss the following comments and questions with you.

Our church community, along with many others, has just affirmed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) as a framework for reconciliation. The Declaration is eloquent and specific on Indigenous rights to education in articles 13 and 14. Articles 18 and 19 of the Declaration are also relevant to education, in their requirement of Indigenous participation and consent with respect to decision making that may affect Indigenous rights and communities. These specific articles of the Declaration will be important touchstones as budget commitments to Indigenous Education reform are pursued.

Minister Bennett, we appreciate the Budget 2016 commitments to system transformation “through a respectful process of consultation and partnership with First Nations.” (137) As you are aware, in the last Parliament, consultative processes regarding Indigenous education reform were the subject of significant concern among Indigenous communities and leaders. Bill C-33 was in large part a failure to honour the rights and principles of free prior and informed consent. Compliance with UN Declaration Articles 18 and 19 will include the development of trusting relationships that centre on the holistic vision of Indigenous control of Indigenous education that is expressed in TRC Call to Action #10. *How do you intend to build a meaningful and robust consultative process of system transformation?*

The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue is a place of conversation, learning and action on God’s call to justice, peace and reconciliation. We are a ministry of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, a denomination of 255 churches and ministries and across the country. We enjoy full partnership with the Regional Synod of Canada of the Reformed Church in America, and invest deeply in the major ecumenical organizations in Canada. **Seeking Justice, Speaking Hope**

In dialogue with Indigenous partners, we have learned that the lack of stable and predictable funding has been one of the barriers to educational success. Budget 2016 commitments to Indigenous provide an excellent opportunity to address this important barrier and begin the process of fulfilling TRC Call to Action #8. Minister Bennett, *will you also take steps to address TRC Call to Action #9, specifically by publishing annual reports on the funding and attainment gaps?* Further on funding related issues, we appreciated the very clear elimination of the 2% cap in the substance of Budget 2016 commitments to Indigenous education. These commitments provide stability and predictability until 2020-21. We note that the 4.5% escalator provision discussed in the Liberal platform is surpassed in percentage terms in this period. Nevertheless, given the long term commitment required for reconciliation in Indigenous education, there will be value in resolute dialogue, within the *system transformation* efforts you have committed to, on a long-term statutory commitment to stable and predictable funding.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and questions. We would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this critical element of reconciliation with you. Can we arrange a meeting at your convenience?

Many thanks,

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