



**For Immediate Release**

June 8, 2012

## **Indigenous Lawyers Call on the PM to Stop Blocking a Review of Federal Discrimination Against First Nations Children**

OTTAWA, ON –On June 11, 2012, the National Day of Reconciliation and the anniversary of the Prime Minister’s apology for Residential Schools, the Indigenous Bar Association (IBA) will be calling upon Prime Minister Harper to stop blocking efforts to bring justice and equity to First Nation children on reserves. The Harper Government recently filed an appeal of a Federal Court decision that directs the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to hear a complaint that First Nations children are being discriminated against because of federal underfunding of child welfare services on reserve.

The First Nation Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) filed a human rights complaint in February 2007, alleging discrimination by the Department of Indian Affairs. Currently, First Nations receive 22% less funding for child welfare on reserve compared to funding by provincial governments off reserve. Moreover, Canada underfunds preventive services, which FNCFCS and AFN allege results in the removal of First Nations children from their reserve homes. According to Cindy Blackstock, the head of FNCFCS, there are more First Nations children in care now than at the height of the Residential School era.

The human rights complaint has been challenged by Canada at every step. Last year it challenged the jurisdiction of the Tribunal. In March 2011, the Chair of the Tribunal dismissed the complaint on the grounds that the federal government funding could not be compared to provincial funding. That decision was overturned by the Federal Court in April 2012, which is now being appealed by Canada.

In recognition of our collective past and in support of a better future, people across Canada will be coming together on June 11<sup>th</sup> to participate in *Our Dreams Matter Too*, a national walk and letter writing campaign organized by the FNCFCS where Canadians will call on the Harper Government to give Aboriginal children the same chance to grow up safely at home, get a good education, be healthy, and proud of their cultures. The Indigenous Bar Association (IBA) encourages all Canadians to walk and write in support of the dreams of Aboriginal children and the dreams for Canada’s future.

According to IBA President, Koren Lightning-Earle, “The Harper government continues to fail Aboriginal children in Canada in spite of its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other human rights instruments.”

“The statistics about Aboriginal children in Canada are dire,” said Koren Lightning-Earle, “When it comes to Aboriginal children, Canada’s words and its actions don’t match up.”

Canada recently presented to the UN that it was committed to promoting reconciliation noting that, “*the process of reconciliation includes a commitment to continually improving the relationship with Aboriginal [P]eoples based on the knowledge of our shared past, mutual respect, and a desire to move forward together in partnership*”.

“Canada talks about reconciliation yet it continues to commit significant resources to create roadblocks in a desperate attempt to have this human rights complaint go away. A public airing of the quality of life for First Nation(s) children through a human rights complaint will shed light on the inequalities of services being provided for all to see. Yet the Government persists in its fight to ensure the evidence about discrimination against First Nations children does not get heard,” said Lightning-Earle.

The Indigenous Bar Association is a non-profit professional association of First Nation, Métis and Inuit lawyers, judges, legal academics and law students in Canada.

For further information contact Koren Lightning-Earle, President of the Indigenous Bar Association at: [klightning-earle@indigenousbar.ca](mailto:klightning-earle@indigenousbar.ca) or at 780.721.2345 or visit our website at [www.indigenousbar.ca](http://www.indigenousbar.ca).