



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES
Sixth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Half Day Session on Migration

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Introduction

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) is a national Aboriginal organization representing the concerns and interests of 117 cultural and community development organizations across Canada. The NAFC was established in 1972 to represent the growing number of Friendship Centres, as well as the clients they serve, at the national level. The mission statement of the NAFC is:

To improve the quality of life for Aboriginal Peoples in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society, and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.

Friendship Centres deliver a wide spectrum of programs and services to Aboriginal people living in towns and cities across the country. Friendship Centres are community based and directed Aboriginal institutions serving the interests of urban Aboriginal Peoples in the areas of social, cultural, recreational, economic and community development. Friendship Centres provide and promote human resource development through a wide range of programs and services to a diverse and increasing urban Aboriginal community.

In the past year alone, Friendship Centres across Canada provided over one million people with services through over 1200 programs. All Friendship Centre programs are provided "status-blind", that is, without consideration if a person is a status Indian, non-status Indian, Métis or Inuit.

Observations

Extent of urbanization

In Canada, as in many member states, the Indigenous population is very urban. According to the 2001 Census, nearly 50% of all Aboriginal people live in cities, and 70% off of reserves. In addition, Indigenous peoples are increasingly born and raised in urban areas. Increasingly the unique challenges of 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation Indigenous peoples are coming forward. This presents a tremendous challenge as policy makers have long neglected urban Indigenous issues.

Need for More Programming

As Indigenous people become more urbanized through the various 'push and pull' factors which exist, programming has not come forward to serve their needs. It has long been the expectation of policy makers that programs of general application should address the needs of Indigenous peoples. Throughout the fifty years of programming in Canada, this has been proven to not be the case. In every circumstance, urban Indigenous people are better served, and have more successful programming

outcomes, when services are provided in a culture-based framework. The unfortunate reality is that there lacks only political will to provide for proper interventions.

Specific Issues Requiring Attention

Education

Aboriginal people have historically under-achieved in education. Programs in urban communities for Aboriginal people have been sporadic and under funded. At many levels it is non-existent.

- 48% of Aboriginal people have not completed high school
- 20% of Aboriginal youth (15-19) who dropped out of school did so because they were bored
- 39% of non-reserve population completed post-secondary schooling compared to 55% of non-Aboriginal population

Housing

Urban Aboriginal people are under housed at all levels of the housing continuum. In urban areas across Canada, Aboriginal people are over represented in the homelessness population. As well, years of inaction has increased the demands for social housing units to crisis levels.

- 25% of off-reserve households were in a core housing need vs. 16% of non-Aboriginal people
- 17% of off-reserve Aboriginal people live in crowded housing compared to 7% of non-Aboriginal peoples
- 18% of Aboriginal people living in non-reserve areas required major repairs vs. 8% of the total population

Health

The health status of all Aboriginal people is very poor. Reduced life expectancy, diabetes rates, fetal alcohol syndrome / effects and others highlight the urgent crisis which exists. The level of services available to urban Aboriginal people is not sufficient to address the demands.

- 56% of Aboriginal people reported excellent or very good health
- 45% of Aboriginal people over 15 reported having a chronic health condition
- 7% of the non-reserve Aboriginal population has diabetes vs. 4.3% of the total population
- 31% of the non-reserve Aboriginal population has access to traditional medicine

Employment

Economic development has long been a goal for Aboriginal people living in urban areas. Unfortunately, most of the government's focus on economic development opportunities has taken place on-reserves. Both individuals and organizations require tools and resources to access economic opportunities which exist.

- Aboriginal household income is 87% of non-Aboriginal households
- Average Aboriginal income is \$ 14,553 vs. \$ 19,207 for the non-Aboriginal population
- Aboriginal peoples unemployment rate is 19.1% vs. 7.4% for the non-Aboriginal population

Recommendations

In consideration of the deliberations being undertaken on the nature, scope and challenge of urban Indigenous migration, the following recommendations are provided:

1. That the United Nations conduct an examination of member state urban Indigenous service delivery infrastructure being undertaken;
2. That this examination result in a formal report which reports on best practices in addressing the source and impacts of Indigenous urbanization, the push and pull factors of Indigenous urbanization, and the identity issues raised by urban Indigenous migration;
3. In the development of this report an international gathering of urban Indigenous peoples and their organizations be undertaken to provide their perspectives on the issues and strategies related to urban Indigenous issues.
4. That urban Indigenous issues become a standing agenda item for future sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

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