



Gouvernement  
du Canada

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of Canada



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

July 10, 2021

Union of BC Indian Chiefs

First Nation Leadership Council  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs

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Dear Grand Chief Phillip, Chief Tom and Kukpi7 Wilson:

We are writing on behalf of the governments of Canada and British Columbia, following recent discussions in regards to the wildfires in British Columbia that have been devastating for your communities and families. At this critical moment, it is imperative that we listen to the voices of Indigenous leaders, such as that of the First Nation Leadership Council and engage meaningfully on a path forward that respects Indigenous peoples needs and priorities.

Over the past few days, government representatives and officials from Canada and British Columbia have met with you and other First Nation leaders impacted by the fires. Discussions have been about the concerns around the emergency response, cause of this fire, and how we can work together to improve the response and preparedness process. We are committed to working with you and other First Nation leaders to improve the experience in the short term, and working over the longer term for better outcomes.

In those discussions we heard clear concerns regarding safe rail operations, which are especially important in the context of extreme weather conditions, and the Government of Canada is taking immediate actions to address the concerns of communities that live and work near rail lines.

Transport Canada has issued a Ministerial Order to cease movement of trains between Kamloops and Boston Bar, British Columbia for 48 hours ending midnight local time Saturday July 10. This was done in the interest of safe railway operations and to protect public safety for the temporary return of residents to inspect their homes in Lytton.

To address the concerns regarding risks to community safety from rail operations in extreme weather conditions, Transport Canada will be issuing a new Ministerial Order requiring railways take additional measures to further protect against wildfires in the context of extreme weather conditions. Key provisions of this order will take effect at midnight local time Saturday (at the same moment the order to cease train operations expires). It will require railways to take additional actions to reduce fire risk and increase their capacity to immediately respond to any fire in the context of extreme weather conditions and fire risk. It will include targeted speed restrictions, increased equipment inspections and staging and deployment of additional fire prevention equipment for more rapid response to any fire along the right of way.

Transport Canada is committed to build on recent discussions with Indigenous leadership and local communities to develop a sustained structured process for engagement and consultations on issues related to rail safety and the impacts of rail operations on communities. As a first step, Transport Canada has invited First Nations representatives to participate in a live demonstration of the department's inspections of track and rail equipment in the area with Transport Canada rail safety experts. In the coming days we will follow up with sustained consultations on these issues, including a focused engagement with Indigenous groups, and local communities, along with CN and CP, on additional actions that can be taken to ensure safe rail operations in the context of the extreme weather conditions being seen in the region.

There are a number of investigations ongoing into the tragic Lytton area fire, led by the following agencies: BC Wildfire Services, BC Coroner's Office, the RCMP, and the Transportation Safety Board of Canada. We recognize the importance of trust and confidence in these investigations. Given the independence of these agencies from the governments of Canada and British Columbia, we will encourage these agencies to include processes where First Nation and local government voices are able to be heard.

To address other concerns raised by you and other First Nation leaders, the governments of Canada and British Columbia commit to the following:

- To continue to work with First Nation leaders on concrete steps in the short term to improve the emergency response process, especially around increasing communication and coordinating communication during emergencies.
- To immediately fund initial supports directly to affected households to help them get through this challenging time. We also acknowledge the importance of mental health supports and will work with you to identify how best to meet these needs.
- Recognizing the expertise of the First Nations' Emergency Services Society (FNESS), we will provide support to the Society for immediate surge capacity to deliver greater emergency response and preparedness, such as FireSmart programming, which is especially important since the risk of wildfires remains. Specifically, through its Emergency Management Assistance Program,

Indigenous Services Canada will also provide a requested \$1.8 million in additional funding to FNESS to increase the ability of this experienced emergency management partner to respond to this wildfire season. Indigenous Services Canada will also provide requested funding of \$248,000 to the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), to be divided equally among the organizations (the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs) to address immediate response needs for the 2021 wildfire season.

- To supporting affected First Nations to identify and address the infrastructure needs resulting from damages sustained during the wildfires. We are committed to working closely and in partnership with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to not only build back the infrastructure destroyed by the wildfires, but to build back better.
- To develop a longer-term approach in partnership that recognizes the benefits and expertise of First Nation leadership in Emergency Management by continuing the work identified in the MOU with the First Nations Leadership Council to develop a tripartite agreement on emergency management in British Columbia. Where local communities wish to undertake work to develop emergency management capacity and partnerships, we stand ready to undertake this work together. We recognize the need to work together as equal partners in order for no community to be left behind.
- To work with the First Nation Emergency Services Society to examine the core funding necessary for the Society and First Nations to be able to deliver emergency preparedness and response as identified in that tripartite agreement.
- To support these commitments above, Public Safety Canada is committed to working with First Nations to determine how it can best provide supports to federal, provincial and First Nation partners. Given the unprecedented risks that exist in British Columbia, these efforts will require a focus toward proactive prevention and mitigation efforts and forward-looking recovery measures. Public Safety Canada stands ready to support efforts to move forward on emergency preparedness, especially for First Nations that are at risk in the immediate fire season. Public Safety Canada is also ready to support building back better – with a view on how to better prepare for the kinds of wildfire risks seen already, so as to be better protected in the future.

We also want to be clear that we heard you when you discussed with officials about being directly contacted and communicated with. We are strongly committed to on-going discussions and engagements directly with you – the members of the First Nation Leadership Council – on the items above. Our governments are aligned to work with First Nation communities to specifically ensure that there are no jurisdictional issues that hinder progress on the commitments noted in this letter.

The governments of Canada and British Columbia are committed to strengthening the important relationship with Indigenous peoples and moving forward together along the shared path of reconciliation. We are committed to working to advance reconciliation

and renew the relationship with Indigenous peoples based on affirmation of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. It is important that we find new ways of working together so we can build a path forward together.

In closing, we want to thank First Nations Leadership and organizations for the care and dedication they are focusing on communities. We look forward to continuing to work with you and other First Nation Leadership to address the commitments outlined in this letter to ensure that we advance together toward a better emergency preparedness and response.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Marc Miller, PC, MP  
Indigenous Services of Canada  
Government of Canada



Minister Mike Farnworth  
Public Safety and Solicitor General  
Government of British Columbia

Cc:

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

The Honourable Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport

The Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

The Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure