



Press Release

Prime Minister Excludes Off-Reserve and Non-Status Indigenous People from COVID-19 Response

March 18, 2020 (Ottawa, ON) – Despite Prime Minister Trudeau’s claims to be addressing Indigenous needs in COVID-19 response planning, meetings have included only three out of five National Indigenous Organizations (NIOs). These meetings have excluded the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) and the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC).

CAP is the federally recognized NIO representing off-reserve Status and non-Status Indians, Métis and Southern Inuit Indigenous Peoples. The CAP-Daniels supreme court decision unanimously confirmed that regardless of Status or residency, their constituents are “Indians” under the constitution. Trudeau’s government acknowledged a responsibility to consult with CAP on matters affecting their constituents’ “rights, interests and needs” when it signed the 2018 Political Accord.

“Excluding CAP from these discussions endangers lives in off-reserve and non-Status Indigenous communities” according to CAP National Chief Robert Bertrand. “If only government-designated organizations are allowed to participate in consultations and access support funding, resources will be prioritized for their own membership, who are only a fraction of all Indigenous people in Canada.”

Barriers to off-reserve and non-Status populations were already identified as a risk factor in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry. According to the first call to justice, “programs must be no-barrier, and must apply regardless of Status or location”. Actions being taken federally must follow this principle, or else they will continue to exacerbate inequalities among Indigenous people.

Communities like the homeless at Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side, where CAP leadership visited this past month, face crowding, lack of sanitation and lack of health services. “Across Canada, urban Indigenous people are over-represented among the homeless and chronically ill” stated CAP National Vice-Chief Kim Beaudin. “The federal government needs to consult with representatives for off-reserve and non-Status populations, to make sure that pandemic preparation measures are accessible to these populations.”

CAP is calling on government to immediately take steps to include all NIOs in crisis response planning.

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The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is the national voice representing the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 80% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.