



Press Statement

Prison Population Puts Lives at Risk

August 14, 2020 (Ottawa, ON) –

In March 2020, Minister of Public Safety Hon. Bill Blair called on the heads of Canada's prison system to release inmates as a safety precaution for COVID-19, to lower prison populations and limit the spread of COVID in institutions.

Figures from Statistics Canada released August 12th showed that this call fell short. Federal prison populations declined by only 2% from March to April, compared to a 21% decrease in inmate population at the provincial level over the same period. The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) calls on the government to protect inmates and expedite community release for low-risk and non-violent offenders.

Indigenous Canadians are over-represented in Canada's prisons, due to the impacts of discrimination, colonialism and trauma. As of 2017, 26% of inmates in custody were Indigenous despite being only 5% of the overall population in Canada.

"Failing to reduce prison populations during a pandemic disproportionately puts Indigenous lives in danger" said Kim Beaudin, CAP National Vice Chief, "CAP has had numerous contacts with Indigenous people who applied for early release and were denied by Parole Board of Canada. There will be a second wave of COVID-19 and our people will be severely impacted in the federal institutes across Canada, in violation of their rights"

Provincial corrections systems have led the way in terms of releasing prisoners, with populations declining by as much as 41% in NB, according to Statistics Canada figures.

"It was clear that most of the provinces got the message however Canada failed us" says Kim Beaudin, National Vice Chief. "CAP is calling on the federal government to take seriously the health risks associated with COVID-19 and release our people that pose little risk to the public and are within six months of their release date."

CAP continues to call on all levels of government to expedite release of low-risk and non-violent offenders in prisons and jails throughout the corrections system.

-30-

For media interviews please contact:

Kim Beaudin, National Vice-Chief

(306) 717-1429

k.beaudin@abo-peoples.org

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 70% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.