



Press Statement

Bill C-22 Proposal to Amend Mandatory Minimums and Drug Possession Offenses Critical for Indigenous Peoples

Extensive Consultations Required to Avoid Unintended Consequences and Indigenous Peoples Being Excluded from Amended Legislation

February 18, 2021 (Ottawa, ON) – The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) recognizes the importance of today’s new legislation tabled, Bill C-22. These amendments to the Criminal Code and Controlled Drugs and Substances Act address many years of advocacy by CAP and other organizations calling for reforms to seriously flawed Federal legislation.

“The evidence has been clear that Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately impacted by current laws around mandatory minimums and drug possession offences, and how those offences are classified in various legal statutes”, said CAP National Vice-Chief Kim Beaudin. “CAP has worked alongside organizations like the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACCP) to advocate for reforming drug possession offences and adopting a public health focus on substance abuse. Today’s announcement is a step in the right direction.”

Indigenous people in Canada face significantly higher incarceration rates, suffer higher rates of addiction and mental illness, and are disproportionately impacted from criminalization and the lack of drug treatment.

Going forward, it will be critical for the Federal government to include CAP and other national organizations in meaningful consultations around the implementation of these legal amendments.

In past cases around cannabis legalization, the lack of appropriate consultation resulted in Indigenous peoples continuing to face systemic inequities and suffer disproportionately from the lack of legal protections and a public health focus around substance abuse. It is critical that these new legal amendments do follow that same path.

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For media interviews please contact:

Kin Beaudin

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.