

## First Citizens' Forum

Wosk Centre for Dialogue, March 31<sup>st</sup> 2006

### *Aboriginal Education: Speaking Our Languages*

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Report prepared by the Ministry of Aboriginal  
Relations and Reconciliation

## Acknowledgements

Wellenwí7skucw ne7elye ne Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation tsut-kucw es súcwentem ell es weswísentem re Squamish, re Tsleil-Watuth ell re Musquam es sxlítens-kucw ne temtmícws. Qwenén-kucw ell es súcwentem re stet'ex7éms es setsíct.s-kucw. Qwenén-kucw ell es súcwentem xwexwéyt re kekúkpwpí7 ell re kw'séltktens le sxlítens-kucw ne tmicws es xqwelél'ems-kucw ne Forum. Yiri7 re kukwstéc-kucw.<sup>1</sup>

Hasakhl miinhl Aboriginal Relations ganhl Reconciliation dimt t'ooyaksdiit an diyeehl algax ganhl lip wilaa loohl gat ganhl miinhl siwilaayinskw wilt t'isdiithl hahlaishl iit hugaxam diyecdiit. Iit huxw t'ooyaksdiit naa ant hlimoom wilaa diyectkwhl saytwan.<sup>2</sup>

Chen kw'enmántumiyap, i7xw ta néwyap na k'ú7tsut ta Forum. I7xw stam ta na wilkw'tayap, i7xw stam ta a-snewéyalhyap, texwlañ chet ch'awatm. Tiwa syésem nilh yewáñ snichims ta Ministry kwis na yap ntelktm. N-stl'i7 kwis estetxw ten snichim. Chen t'a7tsut chicháyakm ta a-snichim-yap timá kwis na yap tsut na7 ta skexwúsm-chet.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation would like to acknowledge and honour the Squamish, Tsleil-Watuth and Musqueam who invited us into their territories. We would like to acknowledge the elders who sang for us, and the chiefs and their families for having invited us to meet together in the Forum.

The Ministry would also like to acknowledge and thank the First Peoples Heritage Language and Culture Council, Ministry of Education Aboriginal Enhancements Branch and University of Victoria Aboriginal Teacher Education Program for their valued support and guidance in planning for the Forum. In particular, the Ministry would like to thank all those who kindly offered their help as workshop facilitators

Finally, thank you to all the delegates who attended the Forum. Your suggestions and advice were very much appreciated. This report is part of the ministry's response to your words which we hope accurately reflect the recommendations that arose from the First Citizens' Forum.

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<sup>1</sup> Secwepemc

<sup>2</sup> Nisga'a

<sup>3</sup> Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish)

## MINISTER'S STATEMENT

As Minister responsible for Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, I am pleased to present the First Citizens' Forum Report.

Since 2005, the Province and First Nations have embarked on building a New Relationship based on the principles of mutual respect, recognition and reconciliation of Aboriginal rights and title.

The spirit of the New Relationship is gaining momentum and helping British Columbia to move forward with many important and even historic initiatives, including treaties that will help stimulate investment in First Nations communities.

Securing lands and resources are important and necessary steps for First Nations to build a successful future that will benefit all British Columbians.

The New Relationship is also about recognition of the honoured place First Nations hold in the history of British Columbia. It includes respect for the enduring strength and great beauty of Aboriginal cultures.

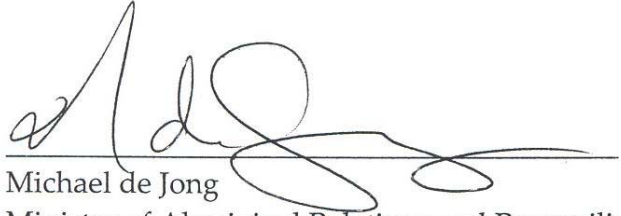
The First Citizens' Forum played an important role in highlighting the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. Participants explored ways to ensure that indigenous languages survive and thrive in British Columbia. The report includes recommendations that represent key priorities for the Province, its partners and Aboriginal communities.

The revitalization of Aboriginal languages is important to all British Columbians because First Nations and Métis culture are symbolic of our shared history. People around the world are coming to know British Columbia both as a place of great natural beauty and as home to diverse and numerous indigenous cultures. First Nations languages are the foundation of that celebrated culture, and the work required to ensure that those languages survive benefits all British Columbians.

In years to come, British Columbians will be able to look back at the First Citizens' Forum of 2006 and note that the gathering resulted in pragmatic, effective steps to preserve, promote and revitalize all Aboriginal languages and cultures in British Columbia.

Congratulations to all participants and supporters of the 2006 First Citizens' Forum for their important work.

Thank you.



Michael de Jong

Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

Feb. 9 2007

Date

## INTRODUCTION

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 2006, delegates from First Nations communities, Aboriginal political groups, Aboriginal leaders, universities and colleges, provincial and federal governments came together in a forum with Premier Gordon Campbell and provincial Cabinet members. Our objective was to speak in support of indigenous languages and the vast archives of knowledge and expertise that are held by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in this province.

The renewal of indigenous languages, the safeguarding and nurturing of these rich and deep stores of knowledge is a profound responsibility shared by all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. For First Nations, Métis and Inuit, the teaching, promotion and revitalization of their languages and the knowledge held within are inseparable from building strong, healthy and thriving communities; from raising well educated and self-assured youth; from ensuring their own survival as distinct peoples.

### **Planning**

In planning for the Forum, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation hoped to achieve three objectives:

- to recognize and acknowledge the experience and wisdom of Aboriginal language educators, practitioners and academics;
- to provide an opportunity for government to learn about the connections between language, culture, healthy communities and educational success;
- to provide the provincial government with recommendations supporting the development of a cross-ministry provincial strategy on Aboriginal languages.

### **Follow-up**

Following the conclusion of the Forum, Ministry staff transcribed the workshop notes, reviewed the forum transcript and followed-up with keynote and plenary panel speakers to discuss specific recommendations brought forward during their presentations. This report is the product of that work. It is divided into two sections: key themes and recommendations.

## FIRST CITIZENS FORUM: KEY THEMES

### **Responsibility**

Indigenous languages, their recognition and revitalization are the responsibility of all British Columbians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Premier Gordon Campbell, in his opening address to the Forum, spoke to this responsibility shared by First Nations and the Province through the New Relationship: *"The New Relationship commits us to work together to revitalize and preserve First Nations culture and languages, and restore literacy and fluency in First Nations languages. Think of the gift that we can give young First Nations children if we maintain, revitalize and re-establish their language in their minds, in their homes; in their communities."*

Recognition of this profound responsibility was shared by all delegates. Regional Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo spoke about his memories of his Grandfather and how *"the tears would be rolling down his cheeks and he would say, 'you can't let it go,' and he was talking about the language, he was talking about our ties to the territory, he was talking about our song and our dance and our expressions through the arts and culture...he would say, 'Shawn, you know, there was always genius amongst our people. There is still genius amongst our people.'" This individual and communal responsibility to speak, learn and pass down the languages, the knowledge, and the genius of "our people" was foremost in the minds of all workshop participants and speakers.*

### **Our Inheritance**

Indigenous languages are the inheritance of all British Columbians. Their survival and the health of this province are intimately connected. In her keynote address, Dr. Lorna Williams (Director of Aboriginal Education at the University of Victoria) spoke to this connection: *"Our knowledge and our wisdom that's embedded in our languages are needed. They're desperately needed to save our land...The wisdom that's in our languages can rebuild [the] balance so that there will be a British Columbia that will exist in seven generations."* Jacob Mckay (Chair of Wilp Wilxo'oskwahl Nisga'a) also spoke of indigenous language as part of our collective culture: *"Huxw k'ilt, hasagay ni dim t'ooyakshl gwilk'a nisimis, nisim an yukw sik'ihl dihitkwahl lip algaxam ganhl lip wilaa loom. Jidaa kw'ootkwahl algax, ii nidii dip di'akhlkwahl dim maksgum, dim ga'amsagum maksgum"*<sup>4</sup>. The Premier echoed this understanding: *"If we lose those languages, we lose a piece of our province's*

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to offer encouragement to all of you engaged in the sacred act of saving our languages and cultures. If we lose those languages, then we lose an integral part of Canadian culture.

*heritage, and in doing so we lose a piece of ourselves”.*

Delegates spoke about language and culture as *“the basis of our survival”*. Jeannette Armstrong (Executive Director of the En’owkin Centre) in her presentation described languages as *“the centre of our spirit as human beings”*. Hon. Tom Christensen also recognised that: *“the preservation and the maintenance, the expanded awareness of First Nations languages in British Columbia, benefits all of us; we gain greater knowledge of the diversity, the history, the values that First Nations bring to our province [which] contributes to the collective wisdom”*. Workshop discussion further affirmed that indigenous languages *“enrich us all...enhancing the lives of our children”*.

### **Indigenous Language and Healthy Communities**

The revitalization of indigenous languages are intimately connected to improving Aboriginal graduation rates and building healthy communities. The loss of language and culture is directly related to the troubling health issues and educational challenges many Aboriginal youth are facing today. Individual and community language and cultural revitalization has the *“power to heal”*. In the workshops, delegates spoke about language and cultural renewal as having the power to *“significantly change the lives of communities;”* that it *“enriches the opportunities for Aboriginal children;”* and that it has *“a profound effect in improving the health, self-confidence and pride of Aboriginal youth and adults”*. It is through the values and ways-of-living that are contained within the languages that the *“strength of the family”* is found and the *“generations are connected”*. Kathy Michel (Co-founder Chief Atahm School) recounted that when her children *“entered into the public school system at grade eleven, they opened up their science book and said, ‘Oh, this is easy stuff, Slé7e’, which is grandfather, ‘taught us this way back in grade five’”*.

The Forum was also an opportunity for the provincial government to make the connection between language, culture and healthy communities. The Premier recognized that *“preserving and revitalizing [indigenous] languages has a profound impact, especially on First Nations young people. It says that we value their culture. We know that helps lead to greater self-esteem, to improved educational outcomes, and to improved literacy”*. Minister Christensen also acknowledged that *“learning and speaking your languages is essential to achieving a brighter future for today’s generation and the generations who will follow”*.

While the province is beginning to deepen its understanding of indigenous languages and cultures, many participants also stressed that the holistic connections between language, culture and healthy communities have yet to be

fully understood. Delegates called on the province to work harder and to better appreciate *“how our languages support other aspects of our lives.”* There must be *“more respect and acknowledgement that teaching the language is critical to the success of our students”*.

### **Life Long Learning**

For many delegates, the key to making long-term and effective advances in language and cultural revitalization was to approach the challenge from a life-long-learning perspective. Many delegates spoke of the need to place language and culture at the heart of daycare, K-12, post-secondary and adult education programs. Jacob Mckay spoke from the Nisga’a perspective: *Wil tgunhl hihl ganiye’etkwsimis, wil ts’im-ganwilaak’ils wil luu-sgihl gandidils. Dahlaa sgathl gat ii ni wil sit’aatkwsil wil siwilaak’iltkw. Ganwilaak’ils gat, sit’aatkws wil sgatt, ii hliskwt dahlaa luu-t’ip daawihlt ts’im-ts’eets’iks. Hlaa luu-yaltkw. Nihl dii wilaa hihl ganiye’etkwsim tgun. Nit wilaa mahdiithl ganwilxo’oskw*<sup>5</sup>. For such a system of education to be effective, *“language cannot be an add-on”*. Our education systems must reflect the importance that communities place upon their own unique ways of understanding and living in this world. In order for this to happen, Peter Jacobs (Squamish Language Teacher) stressed that *“the medium of instruction needs to be our own languages”*.

Significant challenges remain. *“Operational funding for Aboriginal languages within daycare, K-12 and postsecondary”* and increasing British Columbia’s share of federal funding remain key issues. *“Increasing the number of trained and certified language teachers”* and *“curriculum development”* are also of critical importance. In addition, *“recognition of our languages by post-secondary institutions”* and *“extend[ing] language programs into urban areas”* were key issues of concern. The pressure on our Elders and the need to recognise their commitment and contributions was also forefront in the minds of many speakers. Yet, though the challenges are significant, *“British Columbians would indeed be amazed if they even knew some of what people in the communities have been doing with very little money and resources that they’ve had to be able to work on their languages. It is amazing. It’s a story that is worth telling and learning about”*<sup>6</sup>. It is a story that will provide the foundations for future work.

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<sup>5</sup> The Nisga’a believe that education begins at birth and ends at death. Education is a continual life long process - therefore it is very important for us to have language at all levels – daycare, headstart, nursery, elementary, secondary, college, technical and trades areas, and university academics.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Lorna Williams. Keynote Speech at the First Citizens’ Forum 2006 *“Aboriginal Education: Speaking Our Languages.”*

The New Relationship offers a vision for British Columbia, it challenges all of us to work *“to revitalize and preserve First Nations cultures and languages and restore literacy and fluency in First Nation languages to ensure that no First Nation language becomes extinct”*. The many *“language champions”* that attended the Forum urged government to better understand, support and promote this work. Through the workshops, keynote and panel presentations, the province was encouraged to *“work across ministries and with the federal government”* to help First Nations and Métis realise *“the dream”* of language fluency, full immersion and community cultural and language revitalisation. This work must bring us together, *“we can’t continue to work piecemeal”*. Kathy Michel described the path, one inspired by the work of the Maori: *“know your mountain and then take one step at a time”*.

## **RESPECTING AND PROMOTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

*"We want to transform the relationship between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal British Columbians. In a very real way, the survival of B.C.'s indigenous languages will be a measure of our success."*

**Premier Gordon Campbell.**

The Province will continue to work with key Aboriginal language stakeholders to address the recommendations made during the First Citizens' Forum. The list of workshop recommendations are found in the Appendix.

The following recommendations are drawn from the Forum dialogue and are recognised by the provincial government as the first steps towards ensuring the survival of indigenous languages in British Columbia. They are organised around two core commitments: improving government capacity and strengthening partnerships.

### **Commitment 1**

**Improving Government Capacity:** The provincial government will work to improve its internal capacity to support Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Recommendation: Improve coordination of provincial Aboriginal language and culture programming throughout government.

Recommendation: Recognise the importance of language and culture to Aboriginal health, education and economic development.

Recommendation: Build a strong relationship with Canadian Heritage to ensure that federal funding and programming complement British Columbia's approach and reflects the needs of British Columbia's 34 Aboriginal languages.

### **Commitment 2**

**Strengthening Partnerships:** The provincial government will work to strengthen its relationships with key Aboriginal language stakeholders and work in partnership to implement Aboriginal language and cultural strategies.

Recommendation: Work together with the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC) and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) on the implementation of the *Strategic Plan for First Nation Language Revitalisation in British Columbia*.

Recommendation: Recognise and appropriately remunerate Elders for their work and expertise in language and culture revitalisation.

Recommendation: Support First Nations communities to develop their own language authorities to better plan language and culture revitalisation work.

Recommendation: Review the First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council Act (1990) to determine how this legislation could be updated to further support the enhancement, protection and maintenance of Aboriginal languages.

Recommendation: Explore the development of an Aboriginal Languages Act.

Recommendation: Promote and support the development of Aboriginal immersion schools and programs in British Columbia.

Recommendation: Increase the number of trained and certified Aboriginal language teachers providing effective language instruction for Aboriginal students.

Recommendation: Focus on the recording and archiving of Aboriginal languages to preserve and protect them for future generations. This includes further support for the expansion of First Voices.

Recommendation: Explore cost-effective strategies to extend language and cultural learning opportunities to off-reserve Aboriginal communities.

**Huy ch q'u, Hay chxw q'@, Huy chexw a, T'ooyaksiy' niin, T'ooyaxsut 'nuusm  
Gilaakhasla, Kleco, Kukwstsétsemc, Kukwstum'ulhkal'ap, Lim Limpt, Háw'aa,  
Soga senla, Nenachadahlih, Thank you.**

## **APPENDIX**

### WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Language Funding**

1. More funds should be provided for daycare programs – preschool and headstart.
2. Language teaching needs operational funding from start to finish: daycare, headstart, pre-school – K12 and post-secondary.
3. The monies allocated to provincial schools for language and culture should be separate from targeted dollars and provided as an additional resource.
4. B.C. has 60% of the languages and 1/13<sup>th</sup> of the funding. The province should receive funding that represents 60% of funding from Canadian Heritage.
5. More funds are needed for technology, curriculum, teachers, language instructors and mentorship.
6. The government must recognise the connection between poverty and the challenge of revitalising our languages.
7. A 10 year funding plan should be developed to ensure continuity in funding for languages.
8. Greater funding support should be provided to resource off-reserve language learning.
9. We must move away from short term funding and ensure the continuity of programs.
10. Our languages need to receive an additional \$1 million every year for the next 20 years.
11. Each community should receive \$1 million per year to support language revitalisation.
12. More resources are required to fund technology and digital documentation of our languages.
13. Language Advisory Groups should be funded to support community-based language revitalisation planning.
14. More funds are need to support the Development Standards Term Certificate (DSTC) program.
15. The Province must work with the Federal Government to coordinate appropriate and adequate funding.

## **Respecting Our Elders**

16. Our Elders must be remunerated and recognised for their expertise.
17. Respecting our Elders means that we will provide them with secure funding to do the work they need to.
18. We are losing our Elders and we are not able to replace those language speakers. Our Elders are also knowledgeable about practices and cultures. We must work together to find ways to better support and respect our Elders.
19. We must help our Elders to heal from Residential Schools, so that they can help us with language work.

## **Support for Urban Language Learning**

20. There is a real crisis in the cities where our people reside when they leave our home communities. Funds are needed for language and cultural training in urban settings to support self-identity, a sense of community and family.
21. Better links between First Nations and urban centres must be created.
22. Language Centres are needed in urban areas, i.e. First Voices services.

## **Teaching**

23. More language teaching in school districts is needed. Schools should educate students about the language, culture and protocol of the nation whose lands the school resides.
24. Local Education Authorities need to be more accountable for their spending.
25. We must ensure the needs of communities are met in Education Enhancement Agreements.
26. We must ensure that there is Aboriginal content in curriculum from elementary through high school.
27. The Ministry of Children and Family Development must support families to get involved in language and culture work – public schools cannot do everything. An emphasis on family centred programs, both urban and rural is required.
28. Aboriginal language teachers must be recognised as teachers and receive proper compensation for their work.
29. Aboriginal language instructional strategies should be designed to reflect First Nations traditions.
30. Videos and DVDs should be developed to promote indigenous languages, histories and worldviews for use in schools.

31. We must look at language programs that already exist and examine how we can empower these programs and services that are already operating.
32. There should be an emphasis on adult learning as well as children and youth.
33. Our language must be taught for more than 20 minutes per week – that will not lead to fluency.
34. We must address the issue of accreditation. Our children learn French because our own languages are not accredited.
35. Language Immersion for the whole family needs to be supported. This is vital for community and family health and well-being.
36. We must work to develop Language Nests. They are proven to work.

### **Recognition**

37. Aboriginal languages must receive National Official Language recognition.
38. Indigenous languages in British Columbia must be recognised as Provincial official languages.
39. There must be greater recognition by universities for Aboriginal languages.
40. Language must be woven into:
  - a. Early childhood
  - b. K-12
  - c. Adult
  - d. School/Community/Sports/Health
41. The Province, Federal Government and First Nations must work to create a Declaration on Aboriginal Languages.
42. Metis/Michif must be recognised.
43. Societal racism toward Aboriginal people in Canada must be addressed.
44. An Aboriginal Languages Day should be developed to promote language learning and recognition.
45. The Premier should pressure the Prime Minister to support languages in British Columbia.
46. Aboriginal leaders must speak in support of our languages within communities and in government.
47. Post-secondary institutions must recognise indigenous languages as a required course.
48. Some languages in some school districts are recognised by local post-secondary institutes – this needs to happen across all school districts.
49. Only ten languages are recognised by the Ministry of Education within the Integrated Resource Package process – this needs to change.

50. All students in British Columbia should have knowledge of our First Nations languages.
51. Street signs should be developed in our languages.

### **Working Together**

52. Review what is already working in communities and develop a description of successful Aboriginal language programming.
53. First Nations language educators should meet with Chief Atleo on a regular basis and look at how we can build a stronger strategy towards language.
54. Ministers need to work together with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the federal First Nations & Inuit Health Branch to strengthen Aboriginal Early Childhood development and develop strategic plans at the community level.
55. Aboriginal people must sit down with government in a respectful way and all work together.
56. While our First Nations communities are connecting and working together, B.C. government ministries also need to work together. They need to work with one another and with our people.
57. We need to encourage our aboriginal leaders to develop policies to support language.
58. At the community level we must work with our people to develop fluent speakers, ie. 30 speakers now, 60 speakers in the next 2-5 years. We must look at the tools we need to achieve that goal.
59. We must develop holistic solutions to language revitalisation.