



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES COMMITS TO WORKING WITH URBAN FIRST NATION PEOPLE ON INDIAN STATUS

For Immediate Release

OTTAWA, ON, March 11, 2010 – Today, the Government of Canada introduced legislation to amend Section 6(1) of the Indian Act that pertains to the definition and eligibility of status of First Nations people under the Indian Act.

In April 2009, the Government of Canada was ordered by the British Columbia Court of Appeal to complete amendments to Section 6 of the Indian Act to address on-going gender discrimination issues.

“Friendship Centre doors are open to assist people in applying for their status under the Indian Act,” remarked National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) President Vera Pawis Tabobondung. “But more importantly, we are here to foster a deeper cultural identity in urban Aboriginal people. For so long now, a lot of our clients have been in limbo when it comes to an Aboriginal identity that is rightfully theirs. We hope this is the first step in ultimate reconciliation”

Early Government of Canada estimates show that with this new legislation, more than 45,000 people will now be eligible for status under the Indian Act. The NAFC anticipates that a great portion of these people will reside in urban areas.

“Statistics show that approximately half of the First Nations population reside off-reserve,” noted NAFC Executive Director Peter Dinsdale. “First Nations people who were not entitled to Indian Status under the Indian Act were generally not entitled to reside on reserve lands, and subsequently cannot access certain health and education benefits. In light of this, the NAFC anticipates that a vast number of people eligible for Indian Status will reside in urban areas and will reach out to Friendship Centres for assistance.”

“The last time the Indian Act was amended [in 1985], Friendship Centres were flooded with questions and appeals for assistance,” concluded Vera Pawis Tabobondung. “Although this amendment will resolve a number of Indian Act registration issues, it also raises questions regarding broader issues of identity and finding one’s place in Aboriginal society. Despite the litany of challenges that we will face as a result of this amendment, Friendship Centres are determined to use this as an opportunity to further define and strengthen our nationhood.”

As Canada’s largest infrastructure of Aboriginal service delivery providers, NAFC advocates for the needs of urban First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples.

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