



**PRESS RELEASE  
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## **The Government of Quebec Must Immediately Withdraw Its Project to Legislate on First Nations Languages and Cultures**

**Wendake, March 30, 2023** – In June 2022, the government of Quebec announced its intention to table legislation on cultural safety and Indigenous languages. After several attempts to obtain clarification of said intentions, the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) and its Chiefs Committee finally received an answer about the government’s intentions at a virtual meeting held last Tuesday. The Minister Responsible for Relations with the First Nations and the Inuit, Mr. Ian Lafrenière, reiterated his desire to continue in that direction. However, the Chiefs of the First Nations made it very clear that it is inconceivable for the government of Quebec to legislate unilaterally on their languages without their consent.

Let us recall that, by virtue of their inherent right of self-government, First Nations elect their own governments and have the legitimacy to adopt their own laws. Anything relating to their languages and cultures remains under the purview of First Nations themselves. As a result, the province has an obligation to work differently to demonstrate its respect toward the authority of First Nations and their laws.

As Minister Lafrenière said in his March 28 newswire, the government of Quebec must support initiatives brought by the First Nations and the Inuit of Quebec and respect their precedence in this matter. This means that the provincial government should take its drafting instructions from First Nations. Furthermore, the Indigenous Languages Act (article 6) recognizes the language rights of First Nations as of equal importance to those rights outlined in article 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982. Provincial governments cannot but support the efforts of Indigenous governments in implementing measures to protect and revitalize their languages (articles 7 and 8).

“We call upon the government of Quebec to recognize the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to eradicate the institutional and systemic barriers that it has put in place over the years. It is up to First Nations to teach and legislate on our own languages” asserted Sipi Flamand, Chief of the Conseil des Atikamekw de Manawan (Atikamekw council of Manawan).

“If Minister Lafrenière had earlier had a legislative vision to support First Nations languages, he would have sought out the Chiefs to jointly develop concrete measures to eliminate the barriers in provincial laws beginning with c. 14” said Lance Haymond, Chief of the Kebaowek First Nation.

“In July 2022, the FNEC signed a Regional Education Agreement with the federal government, which includes funding dedicated to languages and cultures in preschool, elementary, and secondary education. In the context of its mission, which is to support First Nations in their complete takeover of education, the FNEC and its member communities assume our jurisdiction over indigenous languages” declared Mr. Gros-Louis, FNEC director general.

### **About the FNEC**

The FNEC is an organization that has been working for more than 35 years towards the recognition of the First Nations’ right to exercise full control over their education, equipped with the necessary resources that are designed and managed based on their values and cultures. For more information, visit the FNEC website at [www.cepn-fnec.com](http://www.cepn-fnec.com).

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