

June 2012

TO ALL CUPE CHARTERED ORGANIZATIONS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

June 21 is National Aboriginal Day. Celebrated on the summer solstice, this important date was proclaimed 17 years ago by Canada's governor general to celebrate the cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

CUPE has a proud history of supporting our First Nations, Inuit and Métis members. Our National Aboriginal Council works to increase participation of Aboriginal peoples in our union, and promotes and defends the rights of Aboriginal workers in both our union and in the community.

During the past year, CUPE has taken action on a number of fronts to help address some of the inequalities Aboriginal people face.

As Canada's largest union, CUPE is striving to improve the working lives of our Aboriginal sisters and brothers from coast to coast. In 2010 CUPE signed a partnership agreement with the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, pledging to work together to increase Métis involvement in the workplace and the union. Partnership agreements like this are an important step toward building a stronger, more diverse union.

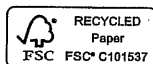
Much work remains in this area, as unemployment among Aboriginal people is double the rate of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Just 61 per cent of Aboriginal adults in Canada are employed, compared to 82 per cent for non-Aboriginal adults. A dramatic wage gap exists too, as earnings of Aboriginal people are just 71 per cent of what non-Aboriginal people earn.

We advocate closing the gap in public services available to Aboriginal communities through our support to organizations like the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (FNCFCS). The FNCFCS took a human rights case to Canada's federal court arguing that the federal government discriminates against Aboriginal children because the support they provide for child welfare on reserves is much lower than what kids living off-reserve get from provincial governments – even though the need on reserves is greater. FNCFCS's campaigns based on *Jordan's Principle* and *Shannen's Dream* seek to create equal access to health care and education respectively for Aboriginal youth.

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PAUL MOIST – National President / Président national CHARLES FLEURY – National Secretary-Treasurer / Secrétaire-trésorier national

TOM GRAHAM – FRED HAHN – DANIEL LÉGÈRE – LUCIE LEVASSEUR – BARRY O'NEILL – General Vice-Presidents / Vice-présidents généraux



We're deeply disturbed by recent cuts to several organizations in the country that specifically address Aboriginal health. As a result of federal budget cuts, the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) has been forced to close down. NAHO cost the federal government just \$5 million per year and provided vital health services to Aboriginal people. The Harper government also decided to cut the Native Women's Association of Canada's one million dollar budget to provide health services for Aboriginal women. These cuts come at a time when Aboriginal peoples suffer higher rates of diabetes, tuberculosis, infant mortality, alcoholism, and several other serious health challenges. We stand opposed to these cuts, and call on the government to restore these vital services.

CUPE also recognizes access to clean, safe drinking water as a basic human right, and advocates for adequate water and wastewater infrastructure in Aboriginal communities. In March, we sponsored day one of an Assembly of First Nations conference on the water rights of First Nations peoples and the threat of the increased commodification of water. Over 121 First Nations reserves are under boil water advisories. The federal government estimates that \$4.9 billion is needed over the next 10 years to address the issue, but their budget tabled at the end of April offers just \$330 million over two years.

Through our support for the Native Women's Association of Canada and other women's rights groups, CUPE has advocated for a full national public inquiry into the epidemic of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. Recently, we sponsored the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) to attend a hearing at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on the subject.

We support land rights and the right to self-government for Aboriginal communities. At CUPE's 2011 National Convention in Vancouver, a priority resolution put forward by the National Aboriginal Council was passed, calling for CUPE to take action in support of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake and their right to self-government.

For 20 years, the Algonquins of Barriere Lake have fought for recognition of the trilateral agreement signed by the Québec and federal governments in 1991 regarding the co-management of natural resources. Their territory is rich with mineral deposits, with mining companies anxious to exploit the land. The federal government has tried to skirt the agreement by replacing the territory's customary chief and council with a new faction supported only by a small minority within the community.

CUPE has supported the Algonquins of Barriere Lake Legal Defense Fund through fundraising initiatives, and by lobbying the federal government to honour their traditional self-government.

CUPE is working to build a truly inclusive and multicultural union. Racial diversity is strength, and we hope that, on National Aboriginal Day, our members will take the time to learn about and share teachings from different Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal communities face many challenges, but together we can fight racial discrimination in our workplaces, and in society at large. We hope you and your local will join us in celebrating National Aboriginal Day by hosting or attending events in your community, or by supporting or partnering with local Aboriginal advocacy organizations.

Together we can build a stronger union, stronger workplaces, and better, more inclusive communities for everyone who shares this land.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CHARLES FLEURY
National Secretary-Treasurer