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ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Transmitted by CNW Group on : May 13, 2010 17:15

AFN National Chief Welcomes Release of Senate Report on First Nations Elections and Looks Forward to Future Progress

OTTAWA, May 13 /CNW Telbec/ - Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo welcomed today's release of the report by the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples entitled First Nations Elections: The Choice is Inherently Theirs.

The Senate Committee's report identified a number of areas where the Indian Act has been counter-productive to effective governance, including an imposed two-year limit on terms in office and a cumbersome appeals process. The report strongly recommended passing control over the design and execution of leadership selection to First Nations communities over the next 10-15 years.

"This report recognizes that the key to improving First Nations elections systems and citizen-centred accountability lies in fully recognizing First Nations jurisdiction over the design and control of our election codes. We would like to build on the recommendations contained in this report and discuss ways we can support the capacity of our nations to re-build their own systems of governing," said National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo.

The report also stated that Indian and Northern Affairs should provide specific funds to support First Nations governments in developing and implementing community-based codes and for conducting elections. Currently, First Nations are not provided with any specific allocation for carrying out elections, and must reallocate from other priorities. This has put enormous strain on chronically under-resourced First Nation governments, especially for First Nations who hold elections under the Indian Act, which currently occur every two years.

The Senate Committee's other recommendations clearly speak to the need to strengthen electoral capacity through consultative mechanisms and support for First Nation led pilot projects and regional electoral initiatives.

On April 1, 2009, the Senate Committee commenced its study of First Nations elections. Over 250 First Nations in Canada currently operate elections under the Indian Act, while just over half of First Nations - or 333 - carry out 'custom elections' where they have established their own systems. An additional 29 First Nations have either maintained their leadership selection system or have successfully negotiated self-government agreements.

The Assembly of First Nations is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.

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