

National First Nations Dialogue on Citizenship
Dialogue national des Premières Nations sur la citoyenneté

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

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**Virtual Roundtable on
First Nation Citizenship**

Monday, May 9, 2011

Brief Overview

On May 9, 2011 the Assembly of First Nation convened a Virtual Roundtable on First Nation Citizenship. This event launched the AFN's National Dialogue on First Nation Citizenship and was intended to act as a catalyst to an inclusive and full discussion among First Nations.

The AFN National Youth Council is working to ensure that a strong youth voice is brought forward in this dialogue. Youth council members participated in the Virtual Roundtable and convened gatherings in their regions, providing commentary through the live web-chat.

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The Virtual Roundtable consisted of the following participants:

- National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo
- British Columbia Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould
- Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse
- Elder Billy Two Rivers, Kahnawake Mohawk Nation
- Ashley Julian, AFN National Youth Council Co-chair & Representative for Nova Scotia
- Josh Gottfriedson, AFN National Youth Council Co-chair & Representative for BC
- Noel Joe, AFN National Youth Council Representative for Newfoundland
- Caitlin Tolley, AFN National Youth Council Representative for QC & Labrador
- Chris Kejick-Redsky, AFN National Youth Council Representative for Ontario
- Jerry Daniels, AFN National Youth Council Representative for Manitoba
- Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, President, Native Women's Association of Canada
- Vera Pawis Tabobondung, President National Association of Friendship Centres
- Wendall Nicholas, Councillor, Tobique First Nation, New Brunswick

The Virtual Roundtable focused on the following four questions, reflecting broadly on the theme of *Identity, Nationhood and Change*:

1. What does First Nation citizenship mean to you today? How is this different from your grandparents? Will it be different for your grandchildren?
2. What is your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of citizens and their governments?
3. How would you like to see your Nation move forward?
4. What tools are required to make change a reality?

Over the course of three hours, 526 sites viewed the Virtual Roundtable and there were over 600 online comments. A quick poll done during the online conversation indicated that 39% of participating sites had at least two viewers present, and one site had over 15 participants. Another quick poll indicated that the majority of viewers would most like to communicate their thoughts and ideas through more live online forums, so this will be a continued feature of dialogue.

This summary report provides a highlight of comments shared during the roundtable. The proceedings and web-chat are archived on www.afn.ca for full viewing. AFN is coordinating additional virtual roundtables, and more details will be available in the coming weeks.

Highlight Summary of Proceedings

Following an opening prayer from Elder Billy Two Rivers, the National Chief welcomed participants and provided some context for the discussion:

“We are people of nations, we are citizens of nations, and this discussion that we are gathered here to talk about really goes to the very core of who we are as indigenous peoples, as First Nations. The right to citizenship, as we describe it, is fundamental to this notion of nationhood as well and very much integral to us as peoples and as nations. The very survival of our nations depends upon the reassertion of inherent authority over this issue of citizenship. We look to the treaties as well—the treaties recognize this inherent authority, that our peoples entered into the treaties as independent nations on behalf of their people and that our nations never gave up the right to determine our own citizenship. This is something that has been undermined and superseded through legislation and administrative practices of Canada. We think back to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, that effort recognized that citizenship is vested in First Nations and called for the reconstitution of First Nations governments to determine the criteria for citizenship... We also know of the long-term struggle at the international level to pursue, endorse, and then move towards implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—pointing out under Article 33 the right to define for ourselves this issue of citizenship. We know that Section 6 of the Indian Act has had a remarkable divisive impact on our nations, on our communities, and on our families. So this brings us to ‘What is the role of the AFN?’ We are guided by resolutions passed through First Nations by their Chiefs-in-Assembly, such as resolution 17 (2010), which has given clear direction to support First Nations in their deliberations, through research and analysis, information sharing, and creating opportunities for a focused dialogue and for planning. Because it is nations and their citizens who will need to take the difficult steps to determine this issue.”



Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould introduced the panelists and provided opening comments:

“Our communities are really in a period of change and we’re being reflective and looking at the way we govern ourselves and at the imposition of external governments on our own, individual realities. With the period we’re in, of nation-building, certainly there is not a more important discussion, in my view, than the one about citizenship and who are the citizens of our nations. Certainly it is a complicated and, at times, a politically sensitive discussion but I look at the important decisions our communities are making about who is and who is not a citizen of our nations as being foundational and one of those core institutions of governance that we’re seeking to build and re-build in our communities. This conversation is on-going and this is one of the reasons that we are sitting here today and engaging with our communities across the country in different venues and forums so that we can reach as many people as possible. It’s been fortunate for me to have had the opportunity to speak with parliamentarians in the Senate and in the House of Commons around really fundamental issues that impact our communities and various federal legislative bills that are put forth and passed

that impact our communities in such a concrete way. And to seek to have conversations with the parliamentarians, especially the new parliamentarians, in terms of the impacts that they have in our communities and the reality that it is our communities that will dictate moving forward in a positive way and building our nations versus having decisions made by legislators and approved bills that impact our communities... One of the things that I've had the opportunity to speak to is really contextualizing this discussion and recognizing the distinction that exists within this discussion between status and membership versus citizenship within a nation. The reality of the imposition of the Indian Act has had hugely detrimental impacts on our communities and our communities need to recognize that rights are not attributed through the Indian Act. Status is attributed through the Indian Act but there is a distinction between membership and status... Certainly through our national policy and dialogue forums at the AFN we have sought to continue this discussion among our communities across the nation and want to continue to contribute towards the start of this among our communities and to continue to be reflective and recognize the period of change that we're in and move forward in that regard."



“What is the role of the AFN?”

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– National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo



QUESTION 1:

What does First Nation Citizenship mean to you today? How is this different from your grandparents? Will it be different for your grandchildren?

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"We identify ourselves as Mi'gmaq, we identify ourselves as First Nations. I think that citizenship has historically been a Canadian way to implement and categorize who a citizen is, whether it be First Nations or non-native. I think that for my grandparents we were more of a distinct culture. The Creator has provided us with Mother Earth to live in, in and amongst each other. I was sharing a conversation with Elder Two Rivers this morning... We ride in two separate canoes in the same river, but with a different governance perspective... As First Nations people we ride in one canoe and we want to govern ourselves rather than having the Canadian government dictate and specify what we can do... Another thing Two Rivers shared was 'Well, do you vote Ashley? Do you understand that when you go out to vote you are identified as a Canadian citizen?' ...the Mohawk from his community don't participate and don't identify with Canadian citizenship... I think it's going to be different for our children in the next generations to come, but a lot of us here today as the seventh generation will push for our First Nations, citizenship, and ownership of how we identify."

– Ashley Julian



"Citizenship means to be proud to be a First Nations citizen... Our grandparents years ago always classified themselves as First Nations people and they stood up for that, which means a lot to me... I think we have to restore our culture and keep that going. It's important that [our children] understand where they're going and where they come from as First Nations people"

– Noel Joe



"Have we lost that sense of identity and how do we reclaim it? What are the external influences that are impacting us?"

– Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould



"When I was growing up things were different. Colonial governments were very strong and very influential in the way we were thinking. Our elders had difficulties in maintaining our culture with the tremendous impact they were having on us... Today is the reality of the youth sitting here. It's their world, it's their tomorrow. I can live with yesterday and today, they will have tomorrow, and so will my children and grandchildren. The way that we were conditioned before to follow the government declarations or the Indian Act and how it defined us was something that may not have been acceptable to us, but we didn't know how to deal with it. Maybe we just resigned to the fact that 'this is what they're telling us, this is what we've got to follow'. But I think that if we look

back into history that there is a new reawakening... it's the beginning of a quiet revolution—a quiet revolution in how we look at ourselves, in how we see ourselves. That's the important thing... When you look at a passport and it says on that passport 'You are Canadian', well for the purposes of travel... Canada is recognized in the international world, but that does not make me a Canadian... I've had a passport for 40-50 years and I think it's only made me a stronger Mohawk than it has made me a Canadian... The Indian Act has no say on who we are or what we are. We are from our communities and we are a people who are a collective... The first thing the government tried to destroy was our collectivity. "

– Elder Billy Two Rivers

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"Right now citizenship means transfers from one community to another community. Communities that have their own membership can't change their membership if it has to do with Bill C-31 or Bill C-3. I'm hoping for something different for my children because right now our band looks after our Status cards. I hope that all discrimination is eliminated from the Indian Act. I hope to see our government, under Treaty 3, look after our citizenship, and to have transfers from one nation to another nation when I cross the border to the USA."

– Chris Kejick-Redsky



"The AFN some years ago took a very powerful position that recognized that as a person with a disability from a First Nations society I have just as much responsibility as anyone around this table to protect my inherent and aboriginal treaty rights and it may require that some tools be put in place... Access for someone who uses a wheelchair to get into a band office, or for someone who is deaf or hard of hearing to have the right equipment, or for someone who has eyesight like myself to get the help they need to make a contribution to their community... As a citizen of my nation, the Wabanaki nation, and people with disabilities in nations across the land, those tools are now there for you, and so you need to take the steps along with young people, with women, with the elders, and all the people in our communities to ensure that our rights as citizens with disabilities are recognized as well."

– Wendall Nicholas



"The Indian Act has no say on who we are or what we are. We are from our communities and we are a people who are a collective... The first thing the government tried to destroy was our collectivity."

– Elder Billy Two Rivers



“How would citizenship and nation-building within a hereditary clan system on the West Coast be incorporated within the Indian Act?”

– Steven Price (Online Forum Participant)

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“I come from the ‘Atleo bunch’ as it pertains to my village, part of Ahousat is the community that I come from... And I do have a seat at home, that my uncle is covering for me, and my son as well is going to be stepping into responsibilities one day that he is being trained for, that system is still in place back home where I come from. And I think part of the motivation and interest that I find myself wanting to continue to do this work is for the very reason that Steven Price raised—essentially how are we going to address this issue of the way we have always been governed in our communities? That system of governance still exists today where I come from on the West Coast on Vancouver Island, and we refer to it as a hereditary system. You can trace it back in my own lineage for twenty generations and we’re now reflecting internally to make sure we retain the essence of who we are and where we come from. There’s brilliance in our system of governing—it’s been acknowledged that modern nation-state forms of government were based on the inspiration from the Iroquois Confederacy and the way that indigenous peoples govern themselves. So I have just as much interest and would ask some of the same questions that Steven is asking. In fact, we have some of the answer back home. A neighbouring community of mine had a coming into effect of their modern self-governing agreement, or modern-day Treaty, and the ability to appoint and extend the hereditary system was a part of what their new agreement is... Mind you Steven has asked about ways to do that within the Indian Act, but within that system we know that there are customary forms of government that communities can choose from, but the example that I’m citing is one where they have moved beyond the Indian Act... I think that indigenous communities have forms of government that if brought forward into a modern context would have just as much to offer as any other form of government... We bring into these roles who we are, we have to be congruent and true to who we are...”

– National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo



“When we look prior to the Indian Act... we have to respect and acknowledge our chiefs from those times who signed those treaties. They signed those treaties on behalf of all their people and whoever was part of their communities that’s who they recognized... whether you were full Anishinabek or you were working and living within that community and were perhaps not Anishinabek, you were accepted, you were recognized as being members of that community and they signed those treaties with that thought in mind. So when we look at the Indian Act, we know where it came from—it obviously didn’t come from our teachings or our traditions—and this is why our Grand Chiefs in the Anishinabek nation made that resolution in 2007, when we started our consultation on how to create a citizenship code that is reflective of not only our teachings and traditions, but that would be on-going and would be inclusive. We’re now at the point where we’ve developed the citizenship code and our constitution and we’re incorporating our language and our teachings. Most importantly, it is coming from the elders and everyone at the community level. And everyone has agreed that we

should not be excluding anyone who is part of our nation, and the way that we recognize who our people are is if you can claim lineage through one parent—that’s all that’s required because we know who our people are and it doesn’t matter what the Indian Act says or anyone else says... We’re now at the point where some of our First Nations communities within one year will have their last First Nations’ born. That’s taking place in Ontario, and that’s the reality. Unless we can come together right across Canada and say ‘This has to stop’... we have to make this legislation and make those laws and in order to do this we have to be a nation—and what is a nation? A nation has the right to their history, a nation has a right to their language, their spirituality, and all those rights that we keep talking about that are important to us. We can do that as a nation and that’s what we’re striving for.

That’s what I keep hearing at our community consultations and it was always the women who said ‘This has been so hard on us’, because it took away that important role that we had, that role of preparing for the next generation, that role of teaching the young ones as they come into our communities, the role of recognizing our culture, protection of the water and the environment, having a safe environment—that was the role of our women. And for many years we had a piece of legislation, Section 12(1B) in the old days, more recently it was Section 6(2), that was a bill eliminating women and their children and that has to stop. I believe we are working towards that.

I am looking forward to the time shortly when we will not have these divisions among us, when we will be able to say ‘You are a part of our nation’ and here is, whatever format you want to use, but let’s say a card saying ‘You are a part of the Anishinabek nation’... And anyone who has that recognition within the nation also has to have responsibility to that nation. Those responsibilities will be clearly delegated. If you don’t know your language, you will take the initiative and you will be encouraged to learn it. If you don’t know your customs, your ceremonies, you will be given the resources to learn it. The way of doing that is through our clans... We are using the teachings within our clan systems... The roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined, all we have to do is learn them and implement them. That’s what I’m hoping I’ll be able to share with my grandchildren. My children should know it; my grandchildren will definitely have to learn it.”

– Jeannette Corbeire Lavell



“We don’t look at the historical aspect of why the Indian Act was created. It was created to provide a service between the Treaty people and the Crown, to live up to its judiciary promises. The Indian Act was made for the bureaucrats, who wouldn’t know what to do otherwise... We should put the Indian Act back in its proper perspective and give it the title for what is basically is—“Aboriginal FEDEX”, because all they do is deliver packages and different things from the government to keep us quiet—policy and program-oriented. As soon as we get a little bit rebellious they give us a couple new programs to busy us with... Our people were too trusting, and too kind, and too big-hearted... It’s time for the youth to begin implementation to bring about change.”

– Elder Two Rivers



“We keep trying to look piecemeal at the Indian Act, but you know the Indian Act wasn’t developed to assist us. It was put there to start decimating our nations, and that’s exactly what’s happening.”

– Jeannette Corbiere Lavell



“How do you determine membership within the Indian Act?”

– Roger A. Boyer (Online Forum Participant)

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“Self-identifying is one thing...but as one person here stated, she feels like she is ‘a Hollywood Indian—born into a Status card. I don’t really practice my traditions, I don’t know them... They were lost somewhere’. So how do people self-identify?”

– St. Mary’s Youth Leadership Member (Online Forum Participant)

“Our ancestors considered anyone living in a community a member of the community, regardless of who their mother or father was. We need to ensure that we do not continue to use ‘race’ as a method of determining who we are. We are cultural groups, not races.”

– Christine (Online Forum Participant)

“Strong identity is key, but it’s not right to say things will NEVER change if we see ourselves as nations. Things DO change a lot when people sign agreements with the federal and provincial governments that recognize THEIR sovereignty of OUR lands.”

– Taiaiake (Online Forum Participant)



“Given our history, and our backgrounds, we all have different experiences, upbringings, and how we are connected with our communities... The ability to connect, to stay engaged, and to value your ancestry is most important when discussing ‘identity’ and being First Nations.”

– Kluane (National Youth Council Member, Online Forum Participant)



“I totally agree with Elder Billy....so why do our status cards have expiry dates on them?”

– Bernadette Sylliboy (Online Forum Participant)

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“What we need to ask ourselves is what are we doing about the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples]? We need to get off of our butts and start implementation. We are always waiting for the other side to make changes, we are always waiting for them to create legislation that will ease the burden or the tyranny upon us. But what about implementation on our side of the table where we tell them what we’re doing? I mean, I’ll just be glad when I get out of the numbers game and get rid of my number 1912. It was a great year but it’s not a great number for me!”

– Elder Two Rivers



“I would just like to say that according to INAC I have been an expired Indian since 2009. I think it is absolutely ridiculous that I have to re-apply to become a registered Indian under INAC. So despite the numbers on my Status Card expiring, I know that my identity as an Algonquin woman is something that will never expire.”

– Caitlin Tolley



QUESTION 2:

What is your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of citizens and their governments?

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“As a First Nations person you have these responsibilities, and there are lots of people out there who would love to be where you are, to learn these things, to learn these traditions, to learn these customs, to have some culture... So we’re given that task: the responsibility to be the best that we can and that includes every aspect of your life, whether it be your traditions, your physical being, your mental being—they’re all tied together within who you are and where you come from. Your role and responsibility with the government is reciprocating. Even the people who sit at this table right now, we’re no better than anybody else—we’re just a voice. And that voice should come from the people. So to be a strong, unified government starts with who the people are that form it. These people have a responsibility to that government to be a voice, to go and seek out elders and learn what it is to be a First Nations citizen, how to be accountable to the people for the land and our traditions, and how to open doors for people to go through... That’s what a good leader is to me, that’s what governing for our citizens is to me.”

– Josh Gottfriedson



“In Manitoba we have just undertaken a campaign called ‘Fanning the Flame’ and it is based on the idea of the seventh generation lighting the eighth fire. And that the fire must grow... For us, it is about having that banner on which to create momentum and to inspire engagement... When it comes to citizenship from a technical perspective, it is going to change depending on the conversation happening at the local level and depending on what their values are.”

– Jerry Daniels



“It all comes back to whether your grandfather was the Chief, or a great hunter, or a fisherman, or a woodsmen... We were never really talked to about what our role was or our responsibilities or our aspirations, it was always just the way it was—that was what was in your home and that was what transferred out to your community... I suppose if my granddaughter was not going to University and was coming home and was texting me and asking me these questions about ‘What is this word, Anishnaabek?’ or ‘How do you do this?’ then maybe I would go on and appreciate what we got from our grandparents about who we are... Grandmothers have kept the language going and have kept poking us with their sticks to remember our responsibility to care about each other.”

– Vera Pawis Tabobondung

“We must have involvement and not apathy... Otherwise our future generations will not survive and we will not have given them the tools they need...”

– Elder Two Rivers

“My personal experience may or may not be typical, but I had no idea of my own heritage until I was 40 years old. Initially the guilt and shame was difficult, but now I'm moving on and simply accepting that I am like a baby. My question however is this, I've noticed that many people live in areas that are not part of their traditional territory. For example, when I moved to BC, I was concerned what little knowledge I gained from my Haudenosaunee teachers and elders would not grow. In the less than two years I have been here, I've found that there are many MANY people living here whose communities are elsewhere. After all this, I would like to encourage programs that allow elders to teach us using technology such as this webcast. I know so little, and my children even less, but they seem to see that this is important for them to learn and understand. Nia'wen.”

– Jim Jutte (Online Forum Participant)

Regional Chief Angus Toulouse made comments in his Anishinaabe language, closing with *“Language is important.”*



“Language kind of defines us as citizens... It distinguishes us as different tribes and nations... Before we had the foreign language, before we had bilingualism and these Canadian languages that are identified as French and English, we had to learn the Mohawk language to communicate. My brother over here and I, we had to exchange between Mi'gmaq and Mohawk. He's the closest one to us in the Atlantic... It is up to the youth to listen to the grandmothers, the mothers, the aunties, and the teachings that are there about our languages and our culture which identifies us as citizens... The clan mothers taught us how to govern, how to respect the responsibilities we take as First Nations people. We know in our hearts what our responsibility is to the land... Our roles and responsibilities are within our communities, our hearts, within our homelands. We need to ask the questions: what is it to be First Nations? What is it to be Mi'gmaq? What is it to be Mohawk? What is it to be Inuit and Metis? We all share the passion and the values surrounding kinship. We need to continue to light the fire of pride in our young people... to start learning about politics and how to govern ourselves, about what jurisdiction and legislation is, about what our National Chief does in Canada, what the role of the United Nations is... Being youth, we have a responsibility to understand this, so that when we get older we can govern and dictate in independent ways and utilize our Treaties so that if there is no longer an Indian Act [the Canadian government] is not just going to cut us off from everything.”

– Ashley Julian



“One thing I find odd about first nation discussion on citizenship is that citizen is a term that refers to the relationship between an individual and a state. These are not First Nation terms, so why do we keep using these terms?”

– Réal (Online Forum Participant)

“I recognize that within my own community we have our own terms for governance, for citizenship, for nationhood... This is something that we’re addressing in our own particular ways in our communities.”

– Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould

“Is there someone on the panel that is non-status and not a member of their grandmother's community?”

– Lynn Gehl (Online Forum Participant)

“I think the effort and what we are seeking to do collectively is to engage all opinions and to engage all views, whether you’re status, non-status, a member of a nation, or a citizen. Every view matters.”

– Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould

“Corruption in FN governments needs to be eliminated so that all voices can be heard. To move forward people need to take actions that benefit all citizens... One of the biggest challenges of citizenship relate to FN bands only provide services to on-reserve citizens. The on-reserve/off-reserve funding formula effectively splits the community in terms of services.”

– Shelly Thorne (Online Forum Participant)

“One of the things [the elders] gave [the Friendship Centres] was to make sure that our people could find their way home... We didn’t want to be part of an organization or any kind of system that talked about this on-reserve/off-reserve environment. If we were going to have something within the Friendship Centre environment that was going to take something away from the First Nations communities on-reserve then no, we didn’t buy into that, we didn’t want to be part of that because we understood that it was the money and the numbers that were being used to make those splits... Many communities have built upon our successes to stop the labeling, the labeling amongst ourselves, that stops us from having growth... It is the young people that have the freshest minds in going forwarding and maintaining that.”

– Vera Pawis-Tabobondung

“Sadly learning to speak french was more of a priority--learning Ojibway wasn't going to get me a job. That, and my mom doesn't even speak the language. As youth, our cultural models are disappearing from the community.”

– Deyra Jaye (Online Forum Participant)

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“Our culture and traditions are embedded into our language. Our Elders from across Canada state that we need to embrace and revive our language to learn and understand who we are as First Nations People on Turtle Island.”

– Chasity Meuse (Online Forum Participant)

“The English and the French and the other foreign languages can't get it because when we talk about ourselves what we talk about is those that are around the fire... We need to use the languages of understanding amongst us.... I've often said I've never been to Canada. I've been to all of your territories. I've been to the territory Winnipeg happens to be located in, but it's not Winnipeg territory, it could be Assiniboine or some other nation. I don't worry about being off of traditional lands, because right now I'm in Algonquin traditional territory and I'm just as comfortable as I would be anywhere else.”

– Elder Two Rivers

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“The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was founded upon a basis of respect and trust. Rather than First Nation "Citizenship", which may come with its own set of pre-conceived ideas, would it not be more appropriate to consider our individual nations as members of a First Nations Confederacy, while retaining one's unique identity within a given Nation and Clan (such as being Kenien' ke ha: ka/Mohawk within an Assembly of First Nations)?”

– Jim Jutte (Online Forum Participant)

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QUESTION 3:
How would you like to see citizenship in your nation move forward?

"I have a strong concern and passion for citizenship and for the impacts that it is going to have, not only on the generations of today, but on the generations that are coming tomorrow... In my Anishinabe language we say "Learn today. Lead tomorrow."

– Caitlin Tolley



"We should not do things alone. We should not be isolating ourselves. Our strength is really in recognizing each other, recognizing the houses and the fires across the land, not just in Canada but all over this beautiful planet... Right now Canada's laws are changing again, and the Canadian Human Rights Act will have full effect in our communities. We need to ask ourselves: how is this going to impact our citizenship? How is that going to affect the right, whether you live in an urban centre or on-reserve, to get access to the services that you need?"

– Wendall Nicholas



"There is a difference between a nation of citizens and a community... A nation is not a reserve or a small community. They would be part of the larger group. We have 39 smaller First Nations within the Anishinabek Nation. The Anishinabek Nation will be the one that has the constitution and governance structures with citizenship law. Collectively [communities] make those decisions... The Anishinabek is also including those who have lost their status... because they still maintain the language and the culture. Just because they are from urban centres we can still make that connection... It doesn't matter if you leave your community, you are still a part of your larger nation... If we respect our traditions, we respect our culture, and we want to share teachings and language, then we will recognize those people who have been excluded by government and will welcome them back into our nations. It's not happening right now, but we must do whatever is necessary."

– Jeannette Corbiere Lavell



QUESTION 4:

What tools are required to make this change a reality?

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“Language, culture, our traditions are key to who we are and the youth need to know this is who we are. To say in my language “The youth will rise”. The tools would be a commitment from the Chiefs in council, and the nation, the people, to get together and participate in a process of change. To really look at our nations and our roles and responsibilities which need to be made a priority through PTOs, the Grand Chiefs, and the Chiefs-in-Assembly for our National Chief to eventually move forward.”

– Chris Kejick-Redsky



“Is it nation vs. citizenship? First Nations people can pursue self-governance and retain our culture, identity, and sovereignty all the while acknowledging the embedded Canadian citizenship within our federation to conduct and associate with social, economic and political participation in our own ways as First Nations people... We can share [tools] from the North to the West, the East and the South. We don’t work independently anymore. We work as a unit.”

– Ashley Julian



“The tools that we have today, or the tools that we don’t have today to be dealing with our issues is something that we should ensure our next generation gets. Provide them with the ability to learn their language, to learn their history, to learn their culture, to learn their future by developing our own education curriculum. This should be something that we are instructing our youth with.”

– Elder Two Rivers



“When we talk about tools we need to look at our young people. They are the largest population group within our nations across Canada. Granted we need to make sure they get into institutions, get a good, solid educated background in order to be able to set up some of these governance structures. At the same time we need to recognize that we have that resource within our communities--those elders, those people who have that oral history. Those tools are there and to bring them together is going to be up to our young people.”

– Jeannette Corbiere Lavell



“Educating our youth is the key to citizenship and self-governance. They are our future leaders and the funding formula for secondary education must reflect today’s high cost of living.”

– Firekeeper (Online Forum Participant)



“Ten year old Baron, a young man from Fort Severn took over my desk and computer to watch. This is a great way of using new technology to allow people to participate. Watching this young man was interesting--he sat one day with the Mayor of Thunder Bay and shared his ideas ... That is the way it should be.... Listening to the youth and gaining from the experiences of the elders.”

– James from Thunder Bay (Online Forum Participant)

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“Citizenship is something we as a people have strived for. I am a citizen of the Nisga'a nation. I am proud of that and my ancestors who have sacrificed so much for our nation to be able to say I am a citizen. It is my dream that one day my Nisga'a citizenship card is accepted not only internationally but at least provincially and federally and to actually see the changes that have been made. We are the first to go through this transition and it is a very hard road to walk. Who am I without my people? Who am I without my Nation? I am everything for I am FN Nisga'a. I dream of a future of equality for all and for the new citizenship cards to gain the recognition they deserve.”

– Nisga'a Laxsgiik (Online Forum Participant)

“I would encourage people with disabilities to become leaders and part of their leadership structures in their communities. That is how not only your views are shared, but action is taken. In my territory back home we have a council that includes, from each of the three areas involved, a seat for someone elected by the people in the community living with disabilities... It also includes seats for elders and women... I think it is a good way to move forward on issues.”

– Wendall Nicholas



“This type of forum is possible in all of our communities. We need to ensure that we create the opportunities for young people to ask their questions, to have opportunities to answer them and to have the participation of their mothers, and their fathers, and their aunties, and their grandmas, and their great-grandmas... As we move forward we need to continue to do this consensus building, so that when we're at that point together we won't have to debate it anymore, we'll know it because it's all in our hearts and our spirits and we share that.”

– Vera Pawis Tabobondung



“The Indian Act – why not just do away with it all together? Slavery was abolished here in Canada but we still have inter-generational dependency...”

– Hlgu Niis Yuus-Nisgaa (Online Forum Participant)

“This is a conversation we’ve been having for as long as we can remember, but it’s actually intensified in the last two years. It’s a really good discussion that our communities are having, reflecting on the ways that we govern ourselves and on the impacts of the Indian Act. It’s not that overnight the Indian Act is going to be gone... One Chief from BC made an analogy: “The Indian Act is a bubble, or a balloon, and what happens if you take a needle and prick that balloon? It pops, and there’s nothing left.” What we’re looking at doing here is taking that Indian Act balloon and figuring out a way, within our individual communities, to slowly untie the end of it and let air out, wherein, at the end of the day, the balloon no longer has air but we will have established our own appropriate systems of governance to replace the Indian Act... I think about citizenship and developing our constitutions as being fundamental to our core governance... Where we articulate the principles of our nations and the values we will live by in all of the activities we undertake as a community.”

– Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould



“Said perfectly Jody, I agree entirely. We cannot abolish the Indian Act as it is the only protection we have in place for our rights, whether it is colonial or assimilative in nature or not. We need to gradually change the Indian Act or deflate that “Balloon” as you will, so it does not blow up in our faces. If we do not take necessary precautions to the rights we do have, we could potentially lose them all together. The government would love for the Indian Act to abruptly disappear--they would be let off the hook and would ultimately lack the political desire to continue acknowledging of our unique status in this country. I think first we must challenge the discriminatory language that is blatant within the Indian Act.”

– Sasha Maracle (AFN Youth Council Representative for Ontario)



“I’m going to go hardline with the Indian Act. I’m going to demand that it does become an act, OUR act, which should determine how we’re going to treat our visitors. [The Canadian government] has a lot of fulfilling to do, and we can’t do away with it because we’ll be letting them off the hook. We should develop an Indian Act on how they should be respectfully paying their rent, so to speak, because these things are realities. They’ve taken a conditioning of our minds and they’ve criminalized our behaviour when we demand what is rightfully ours.”

– Elder Two Rivers



“Canada needs to value us as the unique people we are, not by the discriminatory definitions provided for them in the outdated, discriminatory, and down-right racist piece of legislation called the Indian Act.”

– Sasha Maracle (AFN Youth Council Representative for Ontario)



Closing Comments

“Elder Albert Marshall in Cape Breton talks about the two-eyed scene approach, that we look at things through our traditional eye and we see it through our Canadian eye... We have teachings from our ancestors that guide our future. In order to move forward we need to carry our values, our identities, our history, whether it’s oral or it’s written, and the tools to engage in legislation within our jurisdictions. Our nationhood’s survival is beyond democracy--we speak from the heart, we stand together, we work together, and we move forward together.”

– Ashley Julian

“I wish conversations about the Indian Act weren't so polarized. Instead of keep it or get rid of it, let's have a conversation about an Indian Act that is just, beneficial for our communities and culture, but also allows certainty and a positive relationship with governments. That's a vision we can all stand behind right?”

– Luuskyetchwe (Online Forum Participant)

“It really requires all of our citizens to believe that they have the right to determine for themselves and the larger community and nation as a whole what it is that we need and want by way of laws, by way of regulations, by way of exploring this very issue of citizenship. It has always been us who are the only ones to determine that, and it will always be us to be the only ones who can determine that.”

– Regional Chief Angus Toulouse

“I know we need to get rid of the Indian Act, but we need to transcend into a new system that does not target young mothers and babies. Someone has to be talking about how INAC is targeting the young mothers of our nations.”

– Lynn Gehl (Online Forum Participant)

“What I want to say to those young people that are out there is go out and get involved. Go to any dialogue or community session that will be sponsored, whether it’s through the Assembly of First Nations or the Friendship Centres or through the Native Women’s Association of Canada because we will also be doing sessions across Canada. More young people need to be heard because this is going to be affecting your future.”

– Jeannette Corbiere Lavell

“We need to include all voices--urban, rural, status, non-status, on-reserve, Métis, Inuit.”

– Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association (Online Forum Participants)

"We are very lucky to be here, to be able to gain this knowledge and have our voices heard. Communities need to remember to involve your youth and your elders in these communications--sit them with the leadership because this knowledge needs to be passed on... We have a duty to mentor those before us... It is time for the believers and the dreamers to step up."

– Josh Gottfriedson



"For First Nations with disabilities when they look at Section 52 of the Indian Act citizenship isn't there, it's in who you are and what you do. It's in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, indigenous people with disabilities are there, that's where their rights are respected. Some people may think that the message today was to disrespect Canada, but I want to remind you that our veterans fought to help defend this democracy and there are still First Nations people on the front-lines in Afghanistan and around the world defending our democracy."

– Wendall Nicholas



"I believe we have more tools to work with than we did a long time ago. We have lots of good words and lots of good leadership. And sometimes I have debates with young people and they're very well-educated and I like that. When you also know that our elders are waiting for us to tap into their resources, to let them share and be a part of the questions and the answers, and to stimulate their thoughts about what the solution is so that all of us can have a better life."

– Vera Pawis Tabobondung



"My responsibilities started when I was born, and started with the teachings of my grandmother. I was raised in the laws of a big house and I know what it means to be a leader and what is expected of leadership. I realize we have many challenges in our communities and we have many impositions upon us--some are absolutely egregious and contain discriminatory aspects that have impacted our nation-building over time--but I know who I am and I know where I come from... It is that First Nation identity that will move us forward. It is not going to be easy--social change is never easy but if we work together, share our experiences, recognize that there has been movement within the Indian Act and that probably a third of our communities are exercising or have adopted their own membership codes that is transitioning and moving forward. We have communities that are negotiating the comprehensive governance arrangements and are exercising that through their constitutions."

– Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould



“There is so much that we need to do amongst ourselves, and part of that is the mutual recognition that Wendall talks about. When I spoke with another champion for people with disabilities, Rick Hanson, said to me ‘You know Shawn, people of First Nations both legally in some ways and in other respects, are not seen by the rest of Canadian society.’ And people with disabilities often remind me of this, because people with disabilities often find themselves not being seen as well... We need to overcome those divisions of not recognizing the challenges, and the needs, and the gifts of people with disabilities. Or the challenges of the 40-year-old, who looks in the mirror and sees an Indigenous face but is saying I don’t know what that means yet--I think what’s being said is ‘I want to know’. We didn’t write the Indian Act, nor did we set up those residential schools, but neither did the rest of Canada--those that are here today, we’ve all collectively inherited a history of deep division amongst ourselves: on-reserve, off-reserve; those that speak their language, those who can’t; those who had time with their elders, like I was so fortunate to have, and those that didn’t have that time. Something seemingly so simple as the right to be buried in your home territory... My own great granny who had lots of turmoil in the relationship with our own community, where did she choose to be put to lay? Right there in our own community... It shows that even in her passing she was saying we’ve got to find a way to reconcile amongst ourselves... I remember the elders stopping me in Ahousaht and saying ‘Whose are you? Who do you belong to?’ I had to remember my mom’s name and my dad’s name and then ‘Oh okay, you’re from the Atleo bunch’. And then came the instructions from the elders about what that meant. So with belonging and that wonderful look of recognition that comes across an elder’s face in your home territory, then comes the understanding of the obligation that belonging brings with it. It’s now time to contribute to the community. It’s now time for us to take up the responsibility of rebuilding our community, rebuilding our nations.”

– National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo



“We must remember that if there are any changes that are going to be brought about, we have to change first, and only we can change ourselves... I think there is a strong possibility now, with the tremendous response that is coming in, that this is going to grow, it’s going to get bigger, and we will bring about change. We rely on our youth to bring that new energy forth and to make things work for us. I opened with a symbolic council fire, but I don’t close meetings anymore. I don’t think this one will be closed either. This is another step, a new beginning, a point in time that we’ve moved forward to. There is no closing, there is a continuity. Each and every one of us must keep that symbolic fire going. As the council fire is lowered, we will take the embers that are there and take them with us to our respective areas. And when we get to those areas we will take those embers and rekindle them to begin the fire of discussion again in our region--to spread the word. I will lower the council fire, thank the Creator for giving us the opportunity to think and work and recognize each other’s qualities and our ability to foster co-existence of all mankind because that is the only thing that will let us prevail.”

– Elder Two Rivers



Next Steps

Virtual Roundtable Series

AFN will be coordinating activities to further dialogue over the coming months. Please visit www.afn.ca and the First Nation Citizenship Portal for background information and dates of upcoming events.

Online Survey

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Please let us know what you think about the four questions discussed at the Virtual Roundtable, through our survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/fncitizenship>

Multimedia Submissions

Or, let your opinions be known through other ways ... AFN is seeking multi-media submissions that creatively explore the broad theme “Identity, Nationhood, and Change”. What does Citizenship and Nationhood mean to you today? What is your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of citizens and their governments? What is the appropriate unit or body to determine citizenship (i.e. you are a citizen of what)? How important is this unit to your identity as an Indigenous person? How would you like to see citizenship move forward in your Nation? What tools are needed to make change a reality?

These **multimedia submissions** can include films, songs, images, sculptures, or any other media—use your imagination! Youth are especially encouraged to make their voices heard. More information on the creation of submissions is available on www.afn.ca.

National First Nation Citizenship Forum

Don't forget to join us at the National First Nation Citizenship Forum, November 15 & 16, 2011 at the River Cree Resort in Enoch, Alberta.

“I think the new Conservative government needs to know that we have a voice and that we are going to continue to voice our opinions. Citizenship will not assimilate me, enfranchise me, nor will it colonize me.”

– Ashley Julian