

Agreement signed to address escalation of violence, racial tensions in Thunder Bay

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The Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) along with the Fort William First Nation has signed a statement of commitment with the City of Thunder Bay to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples in a city that seems to be in crisis.

Signed on Fort William First Nation Tuesday, the agreement recognizes that the escalation of violent incidents in the city has created a “crisis for the leadership and citizens of Fort William and NAN,” according to a statement released by the three parties.

In the agreement, the parties express concern for the safety and well-being of Indigenous people who live in and visit the city, especially youth who must relocate from their home communities in order to pursue their education at post-secondary school, college and university.

Each party also recognizes the “urgent need to improve relations” among the Indigenous population and non-Indigenous population.

Read a copy of the document here: [Statement of Commitment](#)

The agreement follows months of turmoil in Thunder Bay.

Thunder Bay’s Acting Mayor Joe Virdiramo signed the document on behalf of the city of Thunder Bay because Mayor Keith Hobbs has stepped aside after being charged with extortion.

Two Anishinaabe youth were found dead in the city’s waterways this past May and Ontario’s Chief Coroner asked York Regional Police to investigate the deaths after First Nation leaders called for the RCMP to take over the cases because they had no confidence in the abilities of the Thunder Bay police.

The city has also developed a reputation for rampant racism. It has the highest rate of police reported hate incidents against Indigenous peoples in the country.

Barbara Kentner, an Anishinaabe woman, died last month from injuries the family believes were inflicted during a targeted assault in January. Kentner was hit with a trailer hitch thrown from a car with four occupants.

Only one of the occupants, Brayden Bushby, 18, was charged with aggravated assault. According to Thunder Bay police, investigators are still waiting for a report from Ontario’s coroner before deciding whether to upgrade charges against Bushby.

Along with Hobbs, JP Levesque, the city’s chief of police, is also facing criminal charges while the Police Service and its Board are both being investigated by Ontario’s police watchdog.

Senator Murray Sinclair was recently appointed as an investigator and tasked to look into the administration of the Thunder Bay police board.

The agreement signed on Tuesday recognizes “systemic racism exists in Thunder Bay and must be dismantled.”

According to the statement released by the three parties, the commitment calls on the signatories to work collaboratively to ensure the safety and well-being of First Nations

students while in the City of Thunder Bay and to work to address issues affecting the health, safety and security of all residents, regardless of ethnicity, in a respectful and appropriate manner.

An anti-racism campaign will be developed to eliminate racism against Indigenous people in Thunder Bay by challenging racist, hateful, ignorant discourse directed toward Indigenous people and address systemic racism in organizations and institutions, according to the statement.

A “student safety plan” will also be developed.