



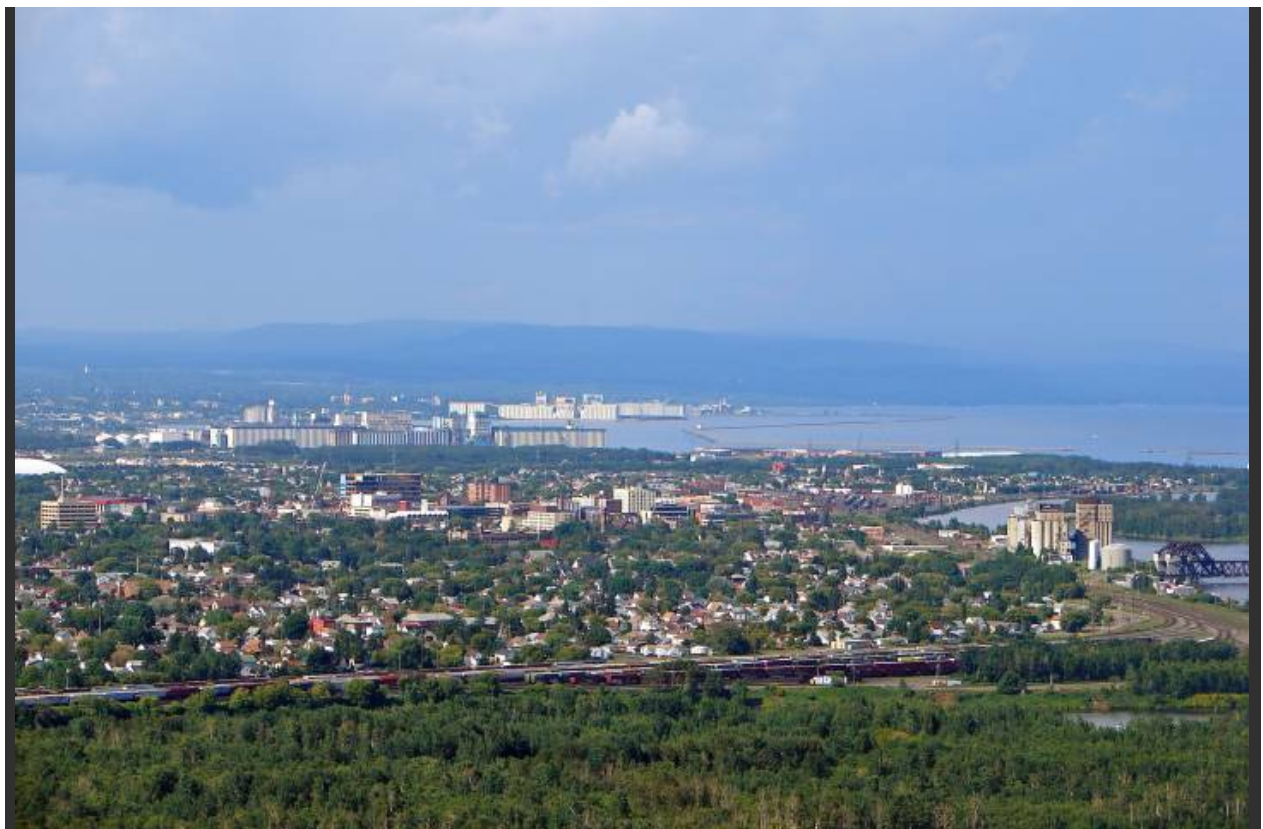
CANADA

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Thunder Bay, First Nations leaders sign pledge to fight racism

By [Brennan Doherty](#) The Canadian Press



Statistics Canada says 29 per cent of all anti-Indigenous hate crimes across Canada in 2015 were committed in Thunder Bay.

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The city of [Thunder Bay](#), Ont., and First Nations leaders in the region have signed a pledge to fight racism in the northern Ontario community, which has been plagued by tensions between Indigenous residents and local police.

The statement acknowledges systemic racism exists in Thunder Bay and says it must be challenged by all members of the community.

“We recognize the urgent need to improve relations among the Indigenous population who reside in and visit (Thunder Bay) to access education, medical and health care, employment, cultural and recreational activities, and the non-Indigenous population,” the statement reads.

The statement signed by the city, Fort William First Nation and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation states the need to improve safety for Indigenous students attending school in Thunder Bay. Indigenous students from outside of Thunder Bay must relocate to the city to complete high school or post-secondary education, the statement said.

It calls for leaders to develop an anti-racism campaign for the city and includes a promise to work together on short-term measures to protect students for the coming school year.

The statement also calls for all three communities to band together and provide dedicated space for Indigenous gatherings, and demands that the Ontario and federal governments provide funding to support their efforts.

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First Nations leaders say Thunder Bay has recently seen several acts of violent racism against Indigenous peoples, including the case of an Indigenous woman who died after being struck by a trailer hitch earlier this year.

Barbara Kentner, 34, told police she and her sister were walking in a residential neighbourhood when someone threw the hitch from a moving car. Her sister, Melissa Kentner, said she heard someone in the vehicle say: “I got one.”

Kentner underwent emergency surgery after the incident Jan. 29, but never recovered.

In a meeting last month, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation also cited the deaths of seven First Nations high school students between 2000 and 2011.

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The issue received national attention after the bodies of a 17-year-old girl and 14-year-old boy were found in a river in May. Local police chiefs have criticized the handling of both deaths by Thunder Bay police.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a group of 49 First Nations communities in northern Ontario, said in an email that the statement represents a commitment to “peaceful co-existence and reconciliation.”

A Statistics Canada report from June states 29 per cent of all anti-Indigenous hate crimes across Canada in 2015 were committed in Thunder Bay.

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