

Thunder Bay and First Nations sign pledge to address racism and student safety

The commitment is a response to calls for a declaration of a State of Emergency

[CBC News](#) Posted: Aug 01, 2017 11:22 AM ET Last Updated: Aug 01, 2017 1:31 PM ET



Fort William First Nation Chief Peter Collins signs the Statement of Commitment to First Nation Youth and Families alongside Thunder Bay Coun. Joe Virdiramo and Coun. Iain Angus. (Kris Ketonen/CBC)

Officials from the City of Thunder Bay, Ont., Fort William First Nation, and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation signed a document Tuesday pledging to fight racism in the city and make it a safe, welcoming place for First Nations students and families.

"I'm excited," Fort William First Nation Chief Peter Collins told CBC. "This is the traditional territory of Fort William, so we want to make sure that everybody that migrates from the north, from Robinson Superior [treaty territory], from our community into the city has an opportunity to be safe and healthy."

The Statement of Commitment to First Nation Youth and Families is a response to [a call from Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler](#) for the city and Fort William First Nation to declare States of Emergencies over the issue of First Nations student safety in the city.

"When we researched what our options were, we found that provincial legislation did not allow for us to do that in things other than natural disasters, and that it wouldn't mean anything in terms of money," said city councillor Iain Angus, noting that NAN's key concern in making the request was triggering a flow of funds from higher levels of government to deal with the safety concerns.

Statement acknowledges individual and systemic racism in the city

With the State of Emergency plan ruled out, representatives from city council then met with leaders from Fort William First Nation, NAN, and other community organizations to work out an alternate approach, Angus told CBC.

The Statement of Commitment was approved by the councils of both Fort William First Nation and the City of Thunder Bay on Monday evening.

It acknowledges the existence of both individual and systemic racism in the city of Thunder Bay and pledges to create a campaign to address both.

"That's a significant first step for the city to acknowledge before we can even talk about solutions," Fiddler said following the signing.

The statement also acknowledges that "unjust practices of past and present governments have resulted in social and economic disadvantages for Canada's Indigenous peoples," adding that "these inequities have often resulted in challenging and unsafe circumstances for First Nations youth, especially those who must leave their home communities to complete their education."

The statement commits the parties to work collaboratively to implement a student safety plan; to create dedicated spaces for and transportation for First Nations gatherings; and to advocate for funding to implement initiatives to meet the needs of First Nations youth and families.