

LETTER FROM REGIONAL CHIEF JODY WILSON-RAYBOULD

Dear Leaders,

The BCAFN is pleased to present the first edition of the *BCAFN Governance Toolkit: A Guide to Nation Building* in accordance with our *Building on OUR Success* action plan and the first pillar of that plan, “Strong and Appropriate Governance.” The Toolkit is a comprehensive guide intended to assist your Nation in building or rebuilding governance and navigating its way out from under the *Indian Act* at its own pace and based on its own priorities. Since it was first conceived, this project has taken on a life of its own and continues to grow. The Toolkit also continues the work of previous BC Regional Chiefs and draws on the growing governance experiences of BC Nations working together to improve the lives of our people.

Simply defined, “Governance” means “establishing rules to coordinate our actions and achieve our goals.” As societies, the institutions we create to make rules and then enforce them, we call “government.” “Governance” and “government” come in many forms but are always needed. They can, of course, be done well or badly. Research and experts tell us the quality of governance, much more than its specific form, has a huge impact on the fortunes of any given society. Ours are no exception. Societies that govern well simply do better economically, socially and politically than those that do not. Good governance increases a society’s chances of effectively meeting the needs of its people.

In many diverse ways, based on our different cultures and traditions, this is exactly what our peoples did for centuries before the arrival of Europeans. The reality that we lived in productive, sustainable and viable societies is testament to the fact that our governing systems worked. With the arrival of the newcomers, all this quickly changed. During the colonial period, while we may have had some form of government under the *Indian Act*, we were for the most part denied the powers (jurisdiction) we needed to govern and the governing institutions that could exercise power effectively.

During the colonial period, our governments were based on models developed by the federal government to deliver its programs and services. The powers of our governments were very limited. The effects on us were unfortunate, as the *Indian Act* system promoted an impoverished concept of government. “Government” for us became little more than managing programs (education, health, housing, social assistance, etc.) and distributing limited resources (money, jobs, influence and services). The concept that government should be about making laws, resolving disputes and generating the means to pursue a collective vision was smothered under the need for federal programs and services and the fact that the local “band office” was the instrument to deliver them.

Thankfully, this is changing and a more robust concept of governance is re-emerging as we slowly rebuild strong and appropriate governance. This is happening for many reasons. One of them is the advancement of our rights of self-determination, both domestically through section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* and internationally through the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. It is also a reflection of the growing political realization that our Nations truly need good governance in order to succeed. And this is not just a realization by us, but by others. Finally, it is also because our Nations are increasingly raising more of their own revenues to provide good governance. In BC, our Nations are leading the way. Between them, they have made over 2,500 laws/by-laws and they are the leaders in numerous “sectoral” and “comprehensive” governance initiatives in Canada along a continuum of governance reform.

The *Governance Toolkit* draws on all of this work in post-colonial governance and brings it together in one document. Much of this work has, in truth, only taken place in the last 20 years as we have translated legal and political victories into practical benefits on the ground and in our communities.

The Toolkit includes a number of parts. The core of the toolkit is a comprehensive *Governance Report* that looks at options for governance reform and considers, subject-by-subject, the powers (jurisdictions) of our Nations. The Report is written from the perspective that the Nation is the building block of governance and that our Nations have the inherent right to govern. It looks at how we are moving in this direction along a continuum of governance options and reforms by providing a snapshot of what our Nations in BC are actually doing.

The Toolkit also includes a **Governance Self-Assessment** in two modules that your Nation can use to evaluate 1) the effectiveness of your institutions of governance, and 2) the effectiveness of your administration. The evaluation is an important exercise that any Nation can undertake to identify what is working well and what not so well, and where the institutional framework may be deficient and where there are gaps, both in terms of the institutions of governance and of the powers of government that may need to be advanced. The third part is **A Guide to Community Engagement** that will assist your Nation to begin or continue discussions with your citizens about the importance of good governance and options for governance reform, including moving beyond the *Indian Act*. The Self-Assessment and the Community Engagement parts of the Toolkit continue to be piloted and will be released in final form to all Nations later this year.

I am pleased to say that the *Governance Toolkit* is being developed in-house by the BCAFN with the support and contributions of many individuals and organizations. Drafts of Report were reviewed by peer groups and the Self-Assessment modules were piloted in a number of our communities and revised extensively following insightful dialogue. Pilots continue. The *Governance Toolkit* is available on the BCAFN website www.bcafn.ca, including most of the primary documents that are referenced in the *Governance Report*.

Finally, transforming *Indian Act* governance is no small task. After years of living under the *Indian Act*, it may be difficult for some Nations, as indeed it has been for the federal government, to shed the routine of colonialism and tackle the seemingly overwhelming task of Nation building. For some, the status quo works and unfortunately serves their self-interest. For others, it may be hard to shed the old ways. Many more they will simply be afraid of change preferring to live “with the devil they know rather than with the one they do not.” There will at times be tensions between current and traditional practices, and a challenge to reconcile them. What is encouraging, though, is that despite the challenges, many of our Nations have already walked through, or are walking through the “post-colonial door” and are establishing strong and appropriate governance with their own institutions of governance and the range of powers they need to govern. While considerable work remains ahead in realizing our collective vision, we are well on our way.



I hope the Toolkit will be a practical and useful resource for your Nation during this exciting period of change and of Nation building. *Gilakas'la*.

Respectfully,

Puglaas (Jody Wilson-Raybould)
Regional Chief