

Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs,  
Infrastructure and Communities



Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales,  
de l'Infrastructure et des Collectivités

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0A3

UNCLASSIFIED

Hon. Bardish Chagger  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A4

October 11, 2022

Dear Ms. Chagger,

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am pleased to respond to the Twelfth Report of the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, entitled "The Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots: A Step towards Reconciliation".

The Government thanks the members of the Committee for their work on this report and expresses our appreciation to all those who appeared before the Committee to share their perspectives. The Government would like to extend special recognition and gratitude to Ms. Idlout, the Member of Parliament for Nunavut, for her dedication and leadership, as well as to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) for his engagement.

The Government agrees with the overall objectives of the report. Indigenous electors across Canada should be able to participate in federal elections and have a positive experience when exercising their right to vote. Every step on the path to reconciliation is important. Finding ways to better include and promote Indigenous languages during the electoral process will increase the inclusivity of, and confidence in, our democratic institutions.

The Government has taken concrete steps to support reconciliation and Indigenous languages in recent years. In 2021, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UN Declaration Act)* came into force, responding to Call to Action #43 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The *UN Declaration Act* provides a road map for the Government of Canada to work in consultation and cooperation with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis on

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the development of an action plan, and to take measures to ensure federal laws are consistent with the Declaration.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also called on the Government to acknowledge that Indigenous rights include Indigenous language rights, through Call to Action #13. The *Indigenous Languages Act*, which received Royal Assent in 2019, acknowledges that the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* include rights related to Indigenous languages. The Government has advanced the implementation of the *Indigenous Languages Act* by appointing the first members to the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, including the Commissioner.

Moreover, the Government has provided additional funding to Indigenous community organizations to develop language initiatives and projects. Canada is also taking part in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to promote, protect, and support Indigenous languages nationally and around the world. A priority under the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee is Inuktitut revitalization, maintenance, protection, and promotion, which was reinforced through the *Inuit Nunangat Policy*, adopted in April 2022. The *Inuit Nunangat Policy* was co-developed through Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee and was adopted to, amongst other objectives, help guide the design, development, and delivery of policies, programs, services, and initiatives that apply in Inuit Nunangat or benefit Inuit.

Each of these actions is a step in the right direction. The Government is committed to ensuring that all Indigenous peoples nationwide have permanent and meaningful access to their cultures and languages as a foundation for identity and belonging.

Elections Canada (EC), particularly during the Forty-Fourth General Election, took steps to increase the inclusion of Indigenous languages in the electoral process. Notably, EC held a project in Nunavut, where it posted a translated copy of the official ballot in Inuktitut near voting booths to serve as a reference for voters. It also issued a trilingual elections brochure (English, French, and Inuktitut) and translated information on the voting process, the candidate list, recruitment messages, and training materials for election workers into Inuktitut. Moreover, EC sought to hire poll workers who spoke at least one Inuit language. Nationally, the “Guide to the Federal Election” and the “Voter ID Information Sheet” were translated into 16 Indigenous languages.

EC has acknowledged that more could be done, including translating more documents into Indigenous languages, such as the “Vote Here” poster. As communicated through the special report, entitled *Report on the delivery of voting services in Cat Lake, Poplar Hill and Pikangikum, Ontario, during the 44th*

*General Election*, the CEO has also requested that EC complete a program review of how it engages with and delivers public education and election services to First Nations communities.

The Government would like to acknowledge the efforts that EC has undertaken to find new and innovative ways to include Indigenous languages in the electoral process that are responsive to community needs, including translating additional materials and signage.

There is more to learn and to do to advance the inclusivity of federal elections for Indigenous peoples. The *Indigenous Languages Act* allows for federal institutions, including EC, to provide access to services in Indigenous languages in certain circumstances and to translate documents under its control into Indigenous languages. The historic *Inuit Nunangat Policy* may also serve as a helpful resource for future initiatives in Inuit Nunangat.

### **Pilot project in Nunavut - Recommendation One**

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that, subject to the requisite parliamentary approval, EC undertake a pilot project, in partnership with Elections Nunavut, to include Inuktitut languages on federal election ballots in the federal electoral district of Nunavut. The territory is a single electoral district whose borders uniquely align with the settlement area under Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. The territory has three official languages: Inuit languages (Inuktitut), which includes Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun; English; and French. In addition, the majority of Nunavummiut are Inuit and speak Inuktitut as their mother tongue.

The Government agrees with suggestions raised at Committee to find constructive ways to work with Elections Nunavut and to learn from Elections Nunavut's experience with a quadrilingual ballot (English, French, Inuktitut, and Inuinnaqtun), including pertaining to accessibility.

The recommended pilot project is viewed as an appropriate first step in exploring the inclusion of Indigenous languages on federal election ballots, with its results providing an opportunity to help inform future decisions.

### **Indigenous communities' advisory group at EC - Recommendation Two**

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that EC establish an Indigenous communities' advisory group with a mandate to formulate recommendations for consideration as to how to make the federal electoral process as accessible as possible for Indigenous voters. Advisory groups have the potential to bring together diverse perspectives with members who can speak to the experiences of Indigenous peoples who live on and outside their ancestral

territories, including in urban centers, and those living in rural and remote Indigenous communities.

**Facsimiles of the official ballot in Indigenous languages - Recommendation Three**

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that EC print and post translated facsimiles of the ballot in various Indigenous languages to serve as a guide for electors at voting places, where appropriate, and as informed by consultations with the Indigenous communities' advisory group in Recommendation Two. During his appearance at the Committee, the CEO confirmed that EC has the tools it needs to implement this recommendation and expressed his intent to undertake such work. The Government notes EC's 2021 facsimile project in Nunavut and acknowledges the merit of expanding such an initiative to additional electoral districts during the next federal election, including those with diverse Indigenous communities and languages.

**Consult with the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages - Recommendation Four**

The Government agrees that EC should consult the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages—comprised of the Commissioner and three Directors who represent the interests of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis—as a matter of guidance in advancing the inclusion of Indigenous languages in the electoral system. The Commissioner's and Directors' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous communities can help facilitate better outcomes for Indigenous electors.

Once again, on behalf of the Government, please accept my sincere thanks to the Committee members on their thoughtful report, the Committee staff who supported this important work, and all the witnesses who were generous with their time and perspectives.

Once tabled, I will ensure a copy of this letter is shared with the CEO.

Sincerely,



Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., K.C., M.P.  
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs,  
Infrastructure and Communities