

# "Idle No More" campaign hits Ottawa, Atleo says

By Lynda Powless  
Editor

OTTAWA- With a snow storm setting the backdrop Friday for one of the first major massive "Idle No More" demonstrations Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Shawn Atleo says "this is an important moment. It is our people's time."

"As I speak there is a great gathering happening in many areas, in Ottawa," he told Turtle Island News in a phone interview Friday morning as the demonstration was being organized outside.

First Nations people from across Canada and the United States arrived in busloads, one young man hitchhiked from central Alberta to be there all to participate in a national day of protest against the policies of the Conservative government.

He said Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence, who's hunger strike hit day 11 Friday, sparking the national movement was weak but in good spirits.

He said she is prepared to end her hunger strike if the government is prepared to commit to a meaningful dialogue on the implementation of treaty rights.

He said they have had no response from Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Governor General (G.G.) Johnson said last week he will not be meeting with Chief Spence or engaging in discussions.

Chief Spence had called for a meeting with the G.G. office and PM. But Governor General Johnson said that kind of meeting "is better

left to elected officials."

Chief Atleo said Chief Spence "is doing this for all First Nations and calling on us to come together and fight internal divisions that might separate us."

Chief Atleo said the AFN has formed a national strategy committee headed by New Brunswick Regional Chief Roger Augustine and Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy to coordinate and develop a national legal, political and communication strategy that does not rule out class action lawsuits being launched against Canada.

"We are working to come together to defend our lands, territory and jurisdiction and ensure economic stability and protection of the environment."

He said "this is us standing in unity, calling on Canada to uphold the treaty and land rights."

The streets of Ottawa were packed with First Nations youth who organized a call to unity through social media.

"So many of the young people are mobilizing under the Idle No More hashtag that we have arrived at a moment where they are saying we are the change we have been looking for. Enough is enough. We have had enough of this unilateral activity by the government of Canada and the environmental crisis being created," said Chief Atleo.

He said the First Nations movement goes beyond Ottawa and Canada.

"We (AFN) signed a protocol with the Iroquois Caucus at our December

assembly. The AFN does not hold treaty rights but sovereign First Nations and their citizens do.

"We need to arrive at a sense of peace with this land which we don't yet have. We will carry out this effort in a peaceful manner. We will not stand down."

He said First Nations know the Harper government is pushing to develop over \$650 billion in natural re-

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sources that are adjacent to, or on First Nations lands.

He said the "there will be attempts to develop these natural resources and we are beside them, on top of them and we will step in. The economic future of the country will be dependent on us as being full participants...and we will derive our strength from the spiritual realm."

"We are saying we will stand up for the water, air land plants."

He said despite legislative efforts that are tinkering with the Indian Act or being imposed on First Nations "treaty rights are paramount over parliament and laws."

He said, "we will carry out legal challenges, and take this to the Canadian public

and United Nations to see the right to free prior and informed consent enacted and implementation of Section 35 of the constitution."

He said First Nations were in crisis and proposed government cuts and legislative changes are deepening the crisis. He said First Nations leaders were told the direction Ottawa would move on First Nations education and legislation.

"We were all hit by the surprise announcement in August of unilateral cuts in funding. It is a pattern of this government that we are hoping to break. There needs to be nation to nation discussions between First Nations and the Crown."

He said the Idle No More movement is speaking to First Nations.

"I hope this is part of a moment that indigenous people see it is our time. It is the age of indigenous people. We are people with culture and knowledge, a deep knowledge of the land the territories and a deep thirst to connect with harmony and the lands. The Mayans expressed it in their calendar. This marks a moment in time where indigenous people are taking their rightful place."

He said as a result they are coming in direct conflict with nation states, like Canada, "who give expression to their views in legislation like this bill (Bill C-45) that falls short of consultation and accommodation and free and prior consent."

Chief Atleo said he believes "this is our moment



**AFN national chief Shawn Atleo and B.C. Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould at the protest in Ottawa Friday**

and our time to come together and we must overcome any internal divisions and unite."

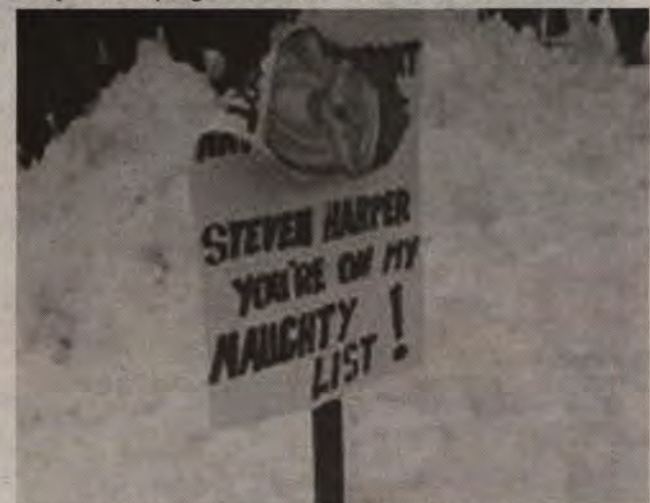
He called the Idle No More movement an "incredible awakening."

He said "the young people are stepping up with one foot anchored in the teachings and the second in the halls of academia and they want to see action. It's a push by the young people. They are helping to be the

change we are looking for."

He said the Canadian government cannot engage "in drive by consultation and over step the nation to nation process. Nations are sovereign and as such we have the constitutional and international treaty right to be respected as such."

He said the Idle No More movement and hunger strikes "have brought into sharp focus the divisions that must be overcome."



**A message in the snow on Parliament Hill**