

### SSUNS Special Session on Indigenous Affairs; Lebanon:

The subject of indigenous affairs is a complicated one. In regard to the issues of health and wellness of indigenous peoples, specifically mental health, communicable diseases and infant mortality, Lebanon firmly believes that the issues of poverty in indigenous communities must be resolved first.

There are about 350 million indigenous peoples across the globe. Though they account for less than 5 per cent of the global population, they comprise 15 per cent of all poor people in the world.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, the poverty rate among indigenous communities is worrisome. The indigenous communities have a 50 per cent poverty rate which is unlike any poverty rate for any disadvantaged group in the country. David Macdonald at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has referred to it as “by far the worst.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 62 and 64 per cent of First Nations children were living below the poverty line. That compared with 15 and 16 per cent among non-indigenous children in the provinces which makes it evident that poverty is a great issue among indigenous communities. Poverty needs to be taken care of before worrying about communicable diseases because it often results in over crowdedness and the most common communicable disease affecting indigenous communities, tuberculosis, strikes poverty stricken environments first. Some causes of poverty are the lack of education and substance abuse.

To combat poverty, the governments of countries should work collaboratively with their indigenous communities to provide accessible and desirable education systems that incorporate cultural values along with non-indigenous values as well. The government needs to ensure that qualified individuals can be granted good jobs without discrimination due to being Native or of Native origin. However, though poverty has to be tackled before health and wellness, health and wellness has to be dealt with before substance abuse as one of the main causes of substance abuse are depression and other mental health problems.

When dealing with health, tuberculosis is one of the most common communicable diseases existing within native communities. Tuberculosis hits poverty stricken areas first due to the fact that people living in poverty stricken areas most likely live and work in overcrowded areas which makes it easier for the bacteria to spread, have limited access to healthcare, and suffer from malnutrition or HIV which dramatically weaken the immune system. Reducing poverty will lessen the commonality of tuberculosis in indigenous communities by taking care of overcrowding and allowing the indigenous peoples to afford proper healthcare and more needed and beneficial foods. Mental health is also a great issue targeting indigenous communities. Evidence of this being the events of Attawapiskat in James Bay, Canada this year. Chief Shisheesh of Attawapiskat called a state of emergency as suicide attempts in his community increased rapidly with 11 attempts in one night. The federal and Ontario governments did

---

<sup>1</sup> "Indigenous People and Rural Poverty." Rural Poverty Portal. Accessed November 9, 2016. [https://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/topic/home/tags/indigenous\\_peoples](https://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/topic/home/tags/indigenous_peoples).

<sup>2</sup> Hildebrandt, Amber. "Half of First Nations Children Live in Poverty." CBCnews. 2013. Accessed November 09, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/half-of-first-nations-children-live-in-poverty-1.1324232>.

respond saying they would deploy their HMEMA team immediately.<sup>3</sup> Overcrowding and bullying in schools are major triggers as having 14 to 15 individuals living in the same home, in some cases, can take tolls on people which is why poverty needs to be taken care of. Many say that historical determinants such as the legacy of residential schools have shaped the mental health of Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> The issue of mental health in these communities does not only exist in Canada. An example being Greenland, 88 per cent of the country's population is made up of Indigenous Inuits and it has the highest suicide rates in the world. It is six times that of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Rutherford, Kate. "Attawapiskat Declares State of Emergency over Spate of Suicide Attempts." CBCnews. 2016. Accessed November 09, 2016.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/attawapiskat-suicide-first-nations-emergency-1.3528747>.

<sup>4</sup> "Common Menu Bar Links." Mental Health and Wellness. 2016. Accessed November 09, 2016. <http://hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/index-eng.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, Beenish. "The World's Indigenous Suicide Crises, by the Numbers." ThinkProgress. April 21, 2016. Accessed November 9, 2016. <https://thinkprogress.org/the-worlds-indigenous-suicide-crises-by-the-numbers-3c44b9e10ff9#.m2gwxe6y7>.