

# PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH TO ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

## *The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation International Indigenous Youth Ambassador Program*

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The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation is committed to advancing its right to self-determination and other rights and interests of the T̓silhqot̓'in peoples under constitutional and international law. The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation is represented by the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government (TNG) and by the communities of Tl'etinqox, ʔEsdilagh, Yunešit'in, T̓sideldel, Tl'esqox and Xenigwet'in. The T̓silhqot̓'in National Government is governed by the T̓silhqot̓'in Nits'il?in-Qi (Council of Chiefs) and advised by the T̓silhqot̓'in T̓š'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan (Women's Council).

The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation mission is to empower T̓silhqot̓'in people to exercise, effectively and appropriately, their rights to self-determination in their traditional territories in ways which reflect T̓silhqot̓'in philosophy, values, experience and culture.

In partnership with the  
**British Columbia Collaborative for Social Infrastructure.**  
This collaborative is designed to strengthen social infrastructure across the province and advance Reconciliation by uplifting Indigenous communities.



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# PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH TO ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

## THE TÎLHQOT'IN NATION INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

### AUTHORS



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### ABOUT THE HONOURING NATIONS CANADA INITIATIVE

Fulbright Canada has become very active on Indigenous issues and has been working with the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Honouring Nations Canada (HNC) is a Fulbright Canada initiative designed to recognize, celebrate, and share stories of Indigenous achievement, which was inspired by the Harvard Project's Honouring Nations program. Through HNC, Fulbright Canada supports a national recognition program for exceptional achievement in Indigenous governance, undertakes virtual and in-person activities and events supporting its mission, and encourages Indigenous economic development.

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### THE T̓SILHQOT̓'IN NATION INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

#### BACKGROUND - T̓SILHQOT̓'IN NATION

The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation is committed to advancing its right to self-determination and other rights and interests of the T̓silhqot̓'in peoples under constitutional and international law. The T̓silhqot̓'in Nation is represented by the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government (TNG) and by the communities of Tl'etinqox, ʔEsdilagh, Yunešit'in, T̓sideldel, Tl'esqox and Xeni Gwet'in.

The T̓silhqot̓'in National Government is governed by the T̓silhqot̓'in Nits'il?in-Qi (Council of Chiefs) and advised by the T̓silhqot̓'in T̓š'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan (Women's Council).

The Nation works collectively and in a united way to advance T̓silhqot̓'in sovereignty, self-government and jurisdiction.

In 2024, the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government (TNG) was recognized as the inaugural "Building Sovereignty/Nation Building" award winner as part of the National Indigenous Good Governance Recognition and Awards Program.

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*We are honoured to be a part of the first National Indigenous Good Governance Awards. Our Nation has worked hard to reclaim jurisdiction of our lands, communities, and people. A key part of this work is to involve our youth and empower them to be leaders in all that they choose to pursue. We are excited to share our experience and to learn from other Indigenous peoples across Canada.*

—Nits'il?in (Chief) Otis Guichon, Chair, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government

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#### BACKGROUND - TÎLHQOT'IN NATION CONT'D

The Tsilhqot'in Nation mission is to empower Tsilhqot'in people to exercise, effectively and appropriately, their rights to self-determination in their traditional territories in ways which reflect Tsilhqot'in philosophy, values, experience and culture.

Through the historic 2014 Tsilhqot'in Decision, the Supreme Court of Canada declared Tsilhqot'in Nation Aboriginal title to a portion of Tsilhqot'in territory, primarily within the caretaker area of Xeni Gwet'in.



*Aboriginal Title is about far more than land – it is about regaining the strength that our ancestors enjoyed prior to colonization. It is about rebuilding our Nation in all areas of life and becoming a fully self-determining Nation once again.*



June 26, 2024, marked 10 years since the historic Supreme Court declaration of Aboriginal Title. The Tsilhqot'in 10-year anniversary of the monumental Title Case win serves to represent and highlight the progressions in sovereignty and nation building that the Tsilhqot'in have achieved since having Title Lands declared. Under this sovereignty, the Tsilhqot'in have been dedicated to enhancing governance and building the capacity of the Nation. A pivotal focus has been on the renewal, revitalization, and enforcement of Tsilhqot'in Dechen Ts'edilhtan (laws).

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#### BACKGROUND - T̄SILHQOT'IN NATION CONT'D

Illustrative examples include:

- **Dechen Ts'edilhtan:** The Tsilhqot'in Nation has drafted its Constitution (called the "Dechen Ts'edilhtan"), through intensive community engagement (including annual governance gatherings held on the land), steered by a Governance Committee comprised of knowledge-keepers from each of the Tsilhqot'in Communities.
- **Ts'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan:** In the spirit of "immediate and sustained progress", the Tsilhqot'in established a Women's Council (the "Ts'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan") to revitalize the central role of women in Tsilhqot'in governance. The Ts'iqi Dechen Jedilhtan plays a critical role in supporting Tsilhqot'in decision-making, guiding the direction of the Nation, and providing leadership for healing and ceremony.
- **Tsilhqot'in Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement (CEMA):** CEMA is a tripartite agreement involving all three levels of government in Canada (BC, Canada, and the Tsilhqot'in Nation), aiming to establish Indigenous-led emergency management.
- **Tsilhqot'in Nidlin ("I am Tsilhqot'in) Initiative:** The formulation of 'Tsilhqot'inised' child and family service legislation, reclaiming jurisdiction from the Federal government and overseeing protective services in accordance with their traditions and laws. Through the completion of these initiatives, the Tsilhqot'in Nation is asserting its jurisdiction and broadening its sovereignty and the scope of self-governance.

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#### BACKGROUND - TÎLHQOT'IN NATION CONT'D

To mark the 10-year anniversary of the Tsilhqot'in Decision, the Nation launched the Tsilhqot'in International Youth Ambassador program as part of its broader international strategy. The international strategy is focused on continued leveraging of international opportunities to showcase the Tsilhqot'in Decision, alongside opportunities to showcase Tsilhqot'in culture and traditions, and bring attention to and seek remedies for ongoing challenges such as those related to mining, protection of the environment, repatriation of sacred objects or to the toxic drug and suicide crises.

The goals of the overall international strategy are to:

- Maintain the high profile of the Tsilhqot'in Nation,
- Continue to hold Canadian governments accountable,
- Develop more international alliances with Indigenous Peoples – as a Nation and as rights holders, assert and defend the collective human rights of Indigenous Peoples globally, as well as to jointly advocate for real change,
- Provide hope and more career and education opportunities for Tsilhqot'in youth,
- Bring international attention to areas of major conflict using international mechanisms and tools, educate leadership, staff and citizens regarding opportunities and limitations, and help to fill a growing gap in leadership at an international level.

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#### TŜILHQOT'IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Tsilhqot'in International Youth Ambassador program supports nation building, youth leadership and the development of a Tsilhqot'in diplomatic corps (including training and involving youth in the international multilateral system as part of TNG delegations).

The overarching goals of this program are:

- To inspire and help Tsilhqot'in youth understand the important world of international diplomacy and relations, as well as provide career and educational opportunities.
- To provide a hands-on training and mentoring program, providing Tsilhqot'in youth (ages 18-25) with a unique opportunity to develop proficiency in international Indigenous human rights standards and to participate effectively in advocacy at the United Nations and other multilateral bodies.
- To help participants learn how international human rights frameworks such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are powerful – and empowering – tools to understanding and addressing key challenges facing their own communities.

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#### TÎLHQOT'IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM CONT'D

For young Indigenous advocates, engaging at the international level can be a profoundly inspiring and life-changing opportunity. Meeting advocates from other regions and learning from their struggles helps put their own experiences in the larger context of global systems of colonialism and oppression. It also exposes young advocates to powerful examples of how other Peoples/Nations have responded with creativity and innovation to the same problems faced in their own communities.

Therefore, the more specific goals are to:

- Connect Tsilhqot'in youth with other Indigenous advocates active at the United Nations and other multilateral organizations such as the Organization of American States.
- Provide opportunities for participation in key international meetings such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Development of community-based programming by participants, to share their knowledge and benefit their peers and communities. The community-based programming would require participants to learn about and apply Tsilhqot'in values and principles to achieve success – for example, principles of respect, being inclusive, working as a team, having a vision.
- Development of resources for other youth, including video and social media tools.
- Creation of a network of Indigenous youth in Canada with experience at an international level to provide mutual support, as well as leadership and mentorship to new generations.
- Sharing culture
- Bringing a Tsilhqot'in youth voice to address critical challenges facing the Nation, including Tsilhqot'in youth.

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### THE TÎLHQOT'IN NATION INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

#### TÎLHQOT'IN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM CONT'D

Training for Tîlhqot'in international youth ambassadors has an emphasis on collective learning, collaboration and mutual support. The program seeks to empower a new generation of Tîlhqot'in youth to understand and apply the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, and also to use their Tîlhqot'in teachings and traditions to benefit their communities and other Indigenous Peoples at a national and international level. This program also prepares them for research and advocacy in their own communities, and more broadly, international internships, education, and careers in international advocacy and diplomacy.

#### 2024 PILOT PROJECT

In 2024, 6 Tîlhqot'in youth participated in the program and attended the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), the largest annual UN conference focused on Indigenous Peoples. The following youth participated:

- Dakota Diablo,
- Xení Lulua,
- Sierra William,
- Chantú William,
- Denzel Guichon, and
- Joely Paul.

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#### 2024 PILOT PROJECT CONT'D

In preparation for PFII, the youth were provided with training and attended the Global Indigenous Women's Caucus, the Global Indigenous Caucus, and the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus prior to the PFII. The youth took full advantage of all opportunities and contributed to the great success of the larger Tsilhqot'in Nation delegation. They shared their culture through drumming and singing; participated in speaking opportunities (including during side events co-hosted by the Nation, at a TNG press conference and in PFII plenary sessions) and met with several prominent Indigenous leaders while at the UN as well as youth from the National Congress of American Indians, and youth from the National Native Title Council in Australia. They also met with a federal Cabinet Minister and the Canadian Ambassador and attended meetings of the Indigenous youth caucus during the week and daily meetings with the larger Tsilhqot'in Nation delegation.

#### 2025 PROGRAM

The 2025 program was smaller than the inaugural program, with two youth selected:

- Sierra William
- Dakota Diablo

This selection was made based upon demonstrated leadership, cultural knowledge, interest in international relations and an assessment of their participation in the 2024 pilot project, as well as ensuring gender balance in the program.

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#### 2025 PROGRAM CONT'D

The youth received refresher training, and similar to 2024, attended the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. They also hosted a dialogue with youth from the Grand Council of the Crees, the National Congress of American Indians, and the coordinator of the Indigenous Youth UN Accelerator Program to find ways to collaborate. The TNG International Youth Ambassadors participated in the PFII from April 19-26, 2025, and spoke multiple times – as panelists at side events, in the plenary, and during the Tsilhqot'in Nation press conference. The youth met several prominent Indigenous leaders while at the UN, as well as the Canadian Ambassador again this year. The youth attended meetings of the Indigenous youth caucus during the week, daily meetings with the larger Tsilhqot'in Nation delegation, side events and PFII plenary sessions, and shared Tsilhqot'in culture throughout, including during the ceremonial launch of the Tsilhqot'in Nation display “Unbreakable” at UN Headquarters, and as featured performers during the United Nations Cultural Event and Reception also held at UN Headquarters. On April 25th, the youth participated in visits/discussions regarding repatriation of sacred objects from the American Museum of Natural History and the Brooklyn Museum along with the larger Tsilhqot'in Nation delegation.

In 2024, the program was supported by contributions from Fulbright Canada, University Canada West (UCW) and the Tsilhqot'in National Government. The 2025 program was supported by contributions from Fulbright Canada, the New Relationship Trust and the Tsilhqot'in National Government.

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#### FOLLOW UP

The youth have shared their areas of interest and are being supported to develop a plan to engage in other international training and activities to further develop their knowledge and experience in the areas that they are interested in.

There are a number of existing human rights training programs as well as international internships and job opportunities – such as training provided by Columbia University and the International Indigenous Women's Forum, internships with multilateral institutions (i.e., the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Intellectual Property Organization), an upcoming foreign service recruitment at Global Affairs Canada with an emphasis on Indigenous Peoples, and opportunities with human rights organizations and other allies. The Tsilhqot'in International Youth Ambassador program can act as a pipeline for these training and work opportunities, and it is also hoped that this cohort of youth will support the training and mentoring of youth that take part in future cohorts of the program.

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#### QUOTES FROM THE YOUTH (2024)

During the 2024 training, the youth were asked to share their thoughts about the opportunity. Below are some of the responses:



*I am incredibly grateful to go to the UN as a youth delegate. I am looking forward to showcasing Tsilhqot'in culture through art, and networking to build relationships.*

**-Chantu William**



*This event to me is so monumental. I have a chance to leave my community and learn what not many other youth have had a chance to learn and share with my own community...[this is] an amazing and rare opportunity to advocate for my home.*

**-Joely Paul**



*"This is a great opportunity to be a voice for our people, sharing our culture and making connections with other Nations. This opportunity will help advance the struggles our Nation has been through – from racism, fighting against colonial practices, redefining ourselves and adapting practices from our old ways and bringing them to light for our future and tomorrow.*

**-Micole Myers**

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#### QUOTES FROM THE YOUTH (2024) CONT'D

During the 2024 training, the youth were asked to share their thoughts about the opportunity. Below are some of the responses:



*I am looking forward to seeing the general workings of the UN, having the opportunity to connect with other Indigenous youth and to hear different perspectives from around the world.*

**-Kaylee Jansen**



*Travelling to the UN is a huge stepping stone towards my goals in learning about other Indigenous people. I intent to find people that have the same interests as I do and share my knowledge on the topic and in return hopefully learn from their perspective.*

**-Denzel Guichon**



*I want to showcase our culture when at the UN and create meaningful relations with youth and world leaders where we can help each other grow and inspire the next generation of Indigenous youth.*

**-Dakota Diablo**

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#### QUOTES FROM THE YOUTH (2024) CONT'D

During the 2024 training, the youth were asked to share their thoughts about the opportunity. Below are some of the responses:



*One of my main goals is to be an advocate for Indigenous youth, to amplify our voices and to be heard...my main topic I focus on is Indigenous youth being overrepresented in the child welfare system.*

**-Sierra William**



*I plan on being a leader in my community and Nation, so I want to gain the knowledge and experience to be able to do that in a good way. I want to also show our youth...that they can do anything they put their minds to.*

**-Xeni Lulua**

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#### FOLLOW-UP QUOTES FROM 2024

In 2024, the youth were asked to prepare reports setting out highlights and learnings, and how they will apply their newly acquired knowledge in their own day-to-day lives and to support their community. Some of the youth provided written reports while others provided verbal reports.

All youth agreed that they greatly enjoyed the experience, with five out of the six youth interested in pursuing additional opportunities in international advocacy and relations. For two of the youth who provided a verbal report, they noted that the biggest highlight was seeing their peers speak with great passion in the United Nations about matters of great importance. In the case of one youth, she said that it gave her more courage, and when she returned home, she spoke publicly at a conference about the state of emergency regarding the drug and suicide crisis in the Nation.



*This is where I am meant to be. I can feel it...Being in the walls of the United Nations and having discussions with people there, I can see myself being in this space. I felt my spark again...I hope my story encourages other Indigenous youth back home to do a program like this. This program made my spark come alive again and made me realize that continuing my education is worth it. This one opportunity has opened my eyes to many other opportunities I did not know about. For my little sisters, my nieces, nephews, little cousins and Indigenous youth, I hope they get an opportunity like this to open their eyes to the fact that there is so much out in the world to experience and bring back to the community to give other younger people hope.*

**-Sierra William**

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#### FOLLOW-UP QUOTES FROM 2024 CONT'D



*I enjoyed every minute of the experience and I took a lot away from it... When we were at the youth caucus I met many youth who were absolutely amazing...So many people that come to the United Nations permanent forum to make statements do so even though it puts their life at risk, they go to speak out against their government and the ones who do this, do this knowing they will not be able to return home to their families, and some knowing that if they are able to return home that they will likely go missing. It was hearing about this that really opened my eyes to the dedication that all indigenous peoples share, every indigenous peoples around the world are proud of who they are and what they believe in, and they will do whatever it takes to make sure that they are heard... The experience as a whole was definitely amazing but there were definitely some parts of my UN experience that will stay with me forever, the first was when I was asked to read a statement with Chief Roger William in one of the big rooms in the UN. It was one of the most exhilarating experiences I have ever had. I was very proud and honoured to be able to take part in this important work and be able to use my voice.*

**-Xeni Lulua**

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#### FOLLOW-UP QUOTES FROM 2024 CONT'D



*Our delegation embarked on a transformative journey to New York, representing the Tsilhqot'in nation as youth ambassadors. Our mission aimed to address pressing Indigenous issues on a global platform, fostering meaningful dialogue, and advocating for change..One of the personal highlights of this trip was drafting a statement on behalf of our nation and receiving overwhelming support to present it to the world. This experience has empowered me to take the knowledge gained back to my community and continue advocating for Indigenous rights. Moving forward, I am committed to furthering my involvement in international work with the UN system.*

**-Dakota Diablo**

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#### 2025 QUOTES

The youth indicated that they greatly enjoyed the experience and are interested in pursuing additional opportunities in international advocacy and relations. One of the TNG International Youth Ambassadors, Dakota Diablo stated:



*“Attending the 24th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues this year, I felt truly empowered by my community and Nation to speak out on longstanding issues that have persisted since the founding of Canada. I had the privilege of meeting so many incredible individuals and forming lifelong connections with people I can count on—and who can count on me in return. This year, with a strong Indigenous youth presence, we showed that we are not only ready but destined to be here. We are reaching out to take the torch passed to us by the giants who came before.*

**-Dakota Diablo**

[Awaiting quotation from Sierra William]

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### THE T̂SILHQOT'IN NATION INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

#### PRESS/COMMUNICATIONS

In 2024, the T̂silhqot'in Nation worked with the communications teams from Fulbright Canada and University Canada West to prepare a [press release](#) regarding the Youth Ambassador Program. The April 10 press release garnered a lot of interest in regional media, and the press conference resulted in [coverage](#) by APTN.

In 2025, the International Youth Ambassadors participated in the T̂silhqot'in Nation press conference in the UN Press Briefing Room on April 24, which garnered media attention, for example: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ts-ilhqot-in-nation-at-un-1.7518274>; and <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/first-nation-in-b-c-at-un-calling-for-government-help-in-battling-toxic-drug-crisis/>