

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Supreme Court of Canada Rejects Application to Hear Social Case**

Today the Supreme Court of Canada announced that they will not hear the Maritime First Nations' case involving the Social Assistance Program on First Nations reserve. The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs, joined by Chiefs in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, filed an application in March 2015 to request leave to appeal the decision of the Federal Court of Appeal in *Chief Jesse Simon v. Attorney General of Canada* which allows the government to proceed with drastic cuts to social assistance rates for First Nations recipients. The Chiefs were also seeking a stay of the Federal Court of Appeal's decision.

In January 2015, the Federal Court of Appeal overturned an earlier decision which found that the Government of Canada did not consult First Nations before deciding to cut social assistance funding and failed to study the full impact of these changes on First Nations. The lower court found that evidence showed that the Harper administration was aware its decision would have severe negative impacts Mi'kmaq individuals, families, and communities, but chose to proceed anyway. The Chiefs pushed forward to have this decision appealed to the highest court in Canada.

"We are disappointed and upset by the court's decision," said Chief Leroy Denny, Lead Chief of the Social Portfolio for the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs. "Our priority has always been our Mi'kmaq community members who are on social assistance and are surviving on very little money. We had hoped that the Courts would recognize that too."

In the *Chief Jesse Simon* Case, the Chiefs are disputing claims, made by the Government of Canada, that the cut to social assistance rates will create equality between First Nations recipients and their non-Native counterparts. They say the cuts result in greater inequality for First Nations since it further restricts access to supplementary programming comparable to what people off reserve receive. The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs have been voicing all along that there needs to be a partnership in addressing social assistance issues on reserve and changes such as these should be made unilateral by the federal government. This case raises broad issues about accountability by the federal government to First Nations regarding services and programs on reserve.

"We obviously still have major concerns moving forward," continued Chief Denny. "We need to know exactly what this is going to look like for our people and how it's going to affect the bottom line. We hope that we can call on the newly elected Liberal government to work with us to ensure that our people aren't starved in order to create Canada's definition of a better life."

*The Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office/Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative works on behalf of the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs in the negotiations and consultations between the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada. KMKNO was developed by the Mi'kmaq, for the Mi'kmaq. The purpose of these negotiations and consultations is to implement our Aboriginal and Treaty rights from the Treaties signed by our ancestors in the 1700's. For further information visit our website at [www.mikmaqrighs.com](http://www.mikmaqrighs.com)*

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