

July 14th 2026

The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Minister Valdez,

We write as the Board of Directors of Indigenous Tourism Alberta to request immediate action regarding the Government's approach to Indigenous tourism and Indigenous tourism organizations. We write in strong support of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), the national body that Indigenous tourism operators and the Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations depend on to sustain markets, coordination, training, promotion, and credibility in Canada's tourism economy.

At Rendezvous Canada, you addressed an international group of tourism buyers—approximately 1,500 international buyers—and communicated that tourism is important to Canada and that the Government supports the sector. However, the subsequent reality is that Government funding has been cut, including most significantly to Indigenous tourism. Your remarks gave the impression of meaningful support and continuity for tourism in Canada, while Indigenous tourism organizations are being forced to absorb the consequences of major funding reductions. That is unacceptable.

Minister Valdez, the harm is not theoretical. Indigenous tourism is estimated to generate approximately \$2.1 billion in economic activity. This sector supports Indigenous workers, entrepreneurs, communities, and families. When national support is weakened or removed, the devastation reaches well beyond a single organization—it reaches the entire Indigenous tourism ecosystem.

Without ITAC, Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations and Indigenous operators will be forced to fail

ITAC plays a national coordinating role that cannot be simply replaced by non-indigenous lead organizations like Destination Canada. Without ITAC support, Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations and Indigenous tourism operators face reduced capacity to:

- access national and international markets;
- participate in coordinated promotion and buyer-facing opportunities;
- receive support for readiness, marketing, and partnerships;
- remain competitive against better-resourced tourism businesses.
- participate in authenticating their experiences through the important Original Original Accreditation

This impact is particularly alarming to Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations, which rely on ITAC to function as a connected national network. If ITAC is not funded, those Provincial and Territorial organizations will be unable to sustain programming, staffing, and coordination—resulting in a broader collapse of Indigenous tourism capacity across regions. In other words, the harm will be national in scope, not limited to Ottawa or to any single program.

This is a Truth and Reconciliation obligation, not optional “priority” language.

This issue is also grounded in Truth and Reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #92 calls on Canada to ensure Indigenous peoples’ histories, perspectives, and lived experiences are properly represented and advanced. Tourism is one of the most visible ways visitors engage with Canada’s story. Failure to properly support Indigenous tourism undermines reconciliation in practice and delays meaningful progress.

Indigenous Tourism Alberta is well supported by the Provincial Government under the leadership of Premier Danielle Smith, whom has shown true support of Indigenous Tourism and has been instrumental in ensuring Indigenous Tourism in this province has been given high priority by being a part of the Higher Ground strategy. This has been demonstrated not only by the financial contributions but her direct action in creating an Indigenous Pillar within the tourism strategy. However it is not the same across the rest of the country, and our federal government, while enjoying the image of being supportive of Indigenous initiatives, fall short of the support required. We are thankful to have such strong support in this province, but the Federal support needs to be reinstated! It is important to know the world is watching, as

evidenced by the letters you have received from the global community of tourism operators and organizations who have written their letters of support for ITAC

What we are demanding

Minister Valdez, we are issuing this correspondence as a formal demand for clarity and corrective action. Specifically, we request that you:

1. Publicly clarify what tourism support was miscommunicated to international buyers at Rendezvous Canada, and how that message aligns with the funding outcomes affecting Indigenous tourism.
2. Restore and protect funding for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) so Indigenous operators—and the Indigenous Provincial and Territorial tourism organizations that depend on ITAC—are not pushed into service cuts, layoffs, cancelled initiatives, or closure.
3. Provide a clear plan and timeline for how the Government will support Indigenous tourism in alignment with Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #92.

We expect a response from your office within 14 days, and we request a meeting at your earliest availability to discuss immediate next steps.

Sincerely,

Brenda Holder, John Ritchie, Jeanette Many Guns and Keith Diakiw
Board of Directors
Indigenous Tourism Alberta