



## Band leader slams study

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SASKATOON -- A federally funded study that says most Canadian band elections are undemocratic has outraged a Saskatchewan native leader who is now questioning the sincerity of Ottawa's apology to residential schools survivors.

Chief Lawrence Joseph, leader of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, lashed out at the federal government Wednesday for funding the study.

"This flies in the face of the residential school apology," said Joseph.

"When you make amends, you are saying you will discontinue with hurtful behaviour. This study does nothing but cause damage to First Nations people.

"Shame on the Congress of Aboriginal People. And shame on Indian Affairs."

He called the study, conducted by the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and financed by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "baloney."

He said the congress is little more than an arm of the federal government and isn't credible.

A spokesperson for Indian Affairs was not available late Wednesday afternoon.

The congress, which claims to represent off-reserve aboriginal people, received funding and technical expertise from Indian Affairs to produce the study Justice is Equality, which was released this week.

It states that in the majority of cases, band elections and governance are not democratic. This is particularly true of the 300-plus bands that observe "band custom" rather than following the rules set out by Indian Affairs, said the study.

Congress national Chief Patrick Brazeau said the Saskatchewan federation and its chiefs refused to co-operate "probably because they have something to hide."

From a national conference in Quebec, Joseph noted the "duly elected chiefs" that make up the Saskatchewan federation assembly have passed three resolutions stating the Congress of Aboriginal People is not a legitimate organization.

"Why should we respect them? They have never shown us any," Joseph said.

"We have enough opponents out there."

Joseph said the congress is in no position to preach about democracy.

Joseph said he's tried to get a copy of the organization's membership list and funding without success.

Joseph also said he was never asked to be a part of the study.

"They've never tried. They've never come to us," he said.

He said Brazeau is "full of hot air" and "knows how to manipulate the system."

Joseph said the chiefs of Saskatchewan are willing and eager to continue representing their off-reserve First Nations members, but Ottawa should provide them with adequate funding to do the job.

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