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# 2010 Olympics face the wrath of young natives, Fontaine warns

**Blockades, protests could be unstoppable as desperation mounts, national chief says**

FRANK GUNN/CP FILE PHOTO  
Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine. May 07, 2008

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Aboriginal leaders may be unable to stop protests and blockades from disrupting the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, warns National Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine.

"There's clearly that sentiment in parts of our community for sure," Fontaine told the *Toronto Star* editorial board yesterday, suggesting widespread despair among young Indians may prove more powerful than calls for compromise.

Nor could Fontaine guarantee the "National Day of Action" on May 29 will be peaceful – or that Ontarians can avoid another long summer of blockades over land disputes, such as the Six Nations protest at Caledonia, south of Hamilton.

"There are a lot of very angry young people out there – people who are very concerned about the approach we've taken," he said.

Leaders like himself are considered "sellouts" for suggesting the Olympic Games are going to benefit aboriginal people, as Fontaine did at a recent First Nations meeting in Vancouver. Too many people have seen the international attention garnered by recent Olympic Torch protests over China's crackdown against Tibet.

At the Vancouver meeting, two young women cut short Fontaine's speech on the "unprecedented opportunities" of the 2010 Olympics by rushing up and dumping a bag of apples on the podium.

"The point was that we're sellouts," he said, referring to the aboriginal insult of being red outside and white inside.

These young people, he said, do not believe the 2010 Olympics will end poverty and unresolved land claims, offer better schools or safe drinking water on reserves or "put an end to the terrible situation that causes families to give up their children to state care."

He was not surprised Auditor General Sheila Fraser's report yesterday cited aboriginal children as among the "most vulnerable" in Canada, noting they are eight times more likely to end up in the strained provincial foster-care systems than their non-aboriginal counterparts. Fraser stressed the reasons are linked to poverty, and not to a higher level of abuse among aboriginal families.

"It is not an easy situation. There is real desperation in our communities," said Fontaine, adding 27,000 aboriginal kids are in state care. "We have disaffected young people who see no hope for themselves and no sense of belonging."

He expressed frustration with the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper for inaction on a number of fronts.

After coming to power in 2006, the government ignored the Kelowna Accord, in which the previous Liberal government – with the backing of provincial and aboriginal representatives – pledged to spend \$5 billion over 10 years to improve education, health and quality of life in native communities.

There are 29 First Nations communities without a school and 27 others where schools are dilapidated. Said Fontaine: "We are unable to understand why the government doesn't do the right thing and (make) an appropriate and fair investment in our children."

The May 29 action day is, said Fontaine, "a challenge to the government of Canada to really listen to what we have been saying and to stop imposing its view of what needs to be done."

He praised the creation of the Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a five-year enterprise to examine the treatment meted out to Indian children forcibly educated for decades by government and church authorities, who "tried to take away our identity as Indians."

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The Harper government has pledged to apologize, possibly this spring, but Fontaine says he did not learn details in a recent meeting with the Prime Minister.

At 53, Fontaine is himself a victim, not just of the residential schools program but also of sexual abuse at his live-in school in the Manitoba Ojibwa community of Sagkeeng. It began when he was 10.

As grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 1991, he was the first leader to go public with his own raw personal story.

The fate of many children who went away to residential schools is simply unknown, with no statistics on how many were abused or killed.

For the first time, it is hoped that government and church records will be opened to show the outcome for aboriginal children who never came home.

These children are, said Fontaine, "the missing chapter in Canadian history."

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