

# RFNG co-director Frances Abele appointed to the Order of Canada

Ben Sylvestre



Dr. Frances Abele was appointed to the Order of Canada on June 29, 2022. Image courtesy of Carleton University

The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project's co-director Frances Abele has been appointed to the Order of Canada for her contributions to public policy as a leading scholar of northern and Indigenous political development.

Governor General Mary Simon recently appointed 85 people to the Order, Canada's highest civilian honour, in recognition of their service to the nation. Appointees are trailblazers from across Canadian society who have worked to build a better Canada.

For over 40 years, Dr. Abele's research and teaching in public policy has focussed on the experiences of Indigenous and northern peoples in the country. Her work has positively influenced their lives and the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada today.

Dr. Abele, who is non-Indigenous, began her professional journey in her home province of Alberta at the University of Calgary. She found her way to a career as a professor at Carleton University where she became one of Canada's preeminent policy researchers working alongside Indigenous and northern communities.

In 1991, she joined the research directorate of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples—a landmark commission that affirmed Indigenous people's right to their own land and right to govern themselves had never been extinguished.

## Founding the Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project

Dr. Abele, alongside [Centre for First Nations Governance](#) founder [Satsan \(Herb George\)](#) and governance expert [Catherine MacQuarrie](#), founded the Rebuilding First

Nations Governance Project in 2016 to support First Nations exercising their legal right to govern themselves.

“It’s meant to contribute to building a better future for everybody. One that will be more equitable, and one that will allow people to live good and healthy lives under circumstances they can control,” Dr. Abele said.

The grassroots project supports First Nations who have chosen to create their own laws and to take back responsibility over their land, waters, and communities previously controlled by federal and provincial governments through the Indian Act. It provides First Nations with research and knowledge-sharing opportunities so they can make the transition to self-government more easily and effectively, on their own terms as unique governments of their own.

Satsan, the Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project’s co-director and a Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chief, has been working on this mission for decades. He and Dr. Abele have been joining forces on projects since they met at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Back then, he says he recognized Dr. Abele upheld the two important principles of reconciliation—recognition and respect.

“The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project happened because I knew her, and I was able to get her to help do it,” he said. “I knew that she came at it from this very special place of reconciliation.”

After the honour of being appointed to the Order, Dr. Abele says the moments she’s thinking back to aren’t the times she received official awards.

“There have been two or three times in my life when northerners or Indigenous peoples have expressed appreciation for working with me,” she said. “And you know, that meant everything. They were people that I respected, and that was a very meaningful form of acknowledgement that I was on the right track. I can remember every one of those.”

Dr. Abele says the day following her appointment to the Order was her last as a professor at Carleton. Even though she’s retiring, she’s staying with the Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project. Dr. Abele says she’s looking forward to its future—and even beyond it.

“The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project has five more years to go. Satsan’s vision, which we all shared, was to leave a legacy of highly trained young

scholars and activists, and a knowledge sharing network linking the First Nations and others who worked with us. And I have a feeling that as we approach the end, it will become obvious that there's more writing and thinking and publishing required," she said.

***The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project and its team of partners would like to congratulate Dr. Abele on this important accomplishment. We thank her for her service and dedication to First Nations governance in Canada.***

**[The full list of June 2022 appointees to the Order of Canada is available here.](#)**

Read the Carleton University Faculty of Public Affairs' article on Dr. Abele's appointment to the Order of Canada [here](#).