

# ***ALL CHIEFS TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES***

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

### **All Chiefs Task Force on Children and Families calls for an All Chiefs Meeting on Children and Families pending Human Rights Tribunal Ruling on First Nations Child Welfare**

(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver, BC, May 1, 2015)-The All Chiefs Task Force on Children and Families (ACTF) met with Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (Caring Society) to discuss the implications of historic case before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal alleging that the federal government's inequitable child and family service program discriminates against First Nations children in BC and other parts of Canada on the basis of race and national ethnic origin.

Deeply disturbing evidence filed at the Tribunal confirms that the federal government has not increased prevention funding in BC to keep First Nations children safely with their families in over 24 years resulting in many children being taken from their families unnecessarily. Hearings on the case ended in October of 2014 and the Tribunal is expected to rule in the next few months.

Chief Don Tom, Chair of ACTF stated, "The ACTF maintains that we as Indigenous Peoples have the inalienable and inherent right and responsibility to care for our communities, families and children. Evidence filed at the Tribunal shows the Federal Government has known about the inequalities in First Nations child welfare driving children into care in BC for decades and has done nothing about it. The harm to children and families is overwhelming and tragic. The Tribunal is expected to make a finding of discrimination against the federal government and order it to fix the problem. First Nations in BC must take this opportunity to ensure First Nations and First Nations child and family service agencies have the resources needed to ensure children can grow up healthy and proud in their families. Any steps or decisions must respect First Nations rights to free, prior and informed consent and include First Nations leadership and those directly involved in First Nations child welfare."

"A secret 2012 Aboriginal Affairs document prepared for the Assistant Deputy Minister pegs the child welfare funding shortfall in BC at 21 million dollars a year not including costs for items like investigating child protection reports, child in care related legal, inflation or ensuring agency offices meet building codes." stated Cindy Blackstock, ED of the Caring Society. "Internal high level government documents show the federal government considered transferring the child welfare program to the provinces in 2012. We were pleased to hear federal government officials and lawyers assure the Tribunal that the transfer option was rejected and is not being pursued. It would, of course, be

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highly improper to transfer a program that is subject to a discrimination complaint.”

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit (FNS) Task Group Member said, “I am pleased that the FNS supports the important work of the ACTF and the need for equitable and effective services for children and families in BC. The ACTF was established by the FNS and UBCIC leadership to carry out the timely and necessary work that is required regarding children and families in the face of consistent failure by Federal and Provincial governments. The FNS looks forward to supporting the ACTF, UBCIC and others in hosting an All-Chiefs Meeting on Children and Families to discuss the implications of the tribunal ruling, Jordan’s Principle and other child welfare issues.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, “As we move forward, we need to ensure that those with child welfare expertise and experience be fully involved in children and families matters. Prior to any agreement or process moving forward, there needs to be a full and open dialogue among Chiefs, Leaders, Proper Title and Rights Holders and Child Welfare experts. We as Indigenous Nations and Leaders strive to move away from negative systems and approaches to child welfare and are hopeful that an All-Chiefs Meeting following the Tribunal ruling will provide an opportunity for the first step in moving towards full and direct jurisdiction over children and families in our communities and nations.”

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