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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Condemnation of Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools

(Whitehorse, YK – July 18, 2013)

The BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs, together with BC Chiefs present at the Assembly of First Nations 34th Annual General Assembly in Whitehorse, Yukon, are deeply upset by the horrifically distressing research that has surfaced recently regarding historic human biomedical experimentation on malnourished Aboriginal communities and children attending Indian residential schools in Canada.

A recent research paper by Ian Mosley titled, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952,” has been the subject of considerable media attention over the past few days. In his recently published research findings, Mosby, with the Department of History at the University of Guelph, details a series of nutritional studies of Aboriginal communities and residential schools between the years of 1942 and 1952, conducted by nutrition experts, in cooperation with the Canadian government.

“Our citizens and our communities are still coming to terms with the residential schools legacy and the Mosby research is another painful reminder of these experiences and the ways our people suffered at the hands of the government; in this case being subjected to human experimentation we never consented to,” stated BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould. She added, “Yesterday morning, Chiefs and leaders from across BC came together at the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly and unanimously condemned the past actions of the Crown in condoning human biomedical experimentation on our peoples and in particular our children who attended Indian residential schools. The Report is further evidence for the ongoing need for healing and the important role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the necessity to support our Nations’ work in moving beyond our debilitating colonial period,” she finished.

The research reveals disturbing details of a human biomedical experimentation of national scope, involving at least 1,300 Aboriginal children. According to the research, government tests began in 1942 in a number of remote Aboriginal communities in northern Manitoba. Following this, the initiative spread across the country. In 1947, further research was conducted on at least 1,000 malnourished Aboriginal children in at least six residential schools in Port Alberni, British Columbia, Kenora, Ontario, Schubenacadie, Nova Scotia and Lethbridge, Alberta.

Grand Chief Ed John, of the First Nations Summit Task Group, stated, “The experiments described in Mosby’s research are ‘evidence of a larger institutionalized and dehumanizing colonialist racial ideology which has plagued Canada’s policies towards Aboriginal peoples.’ Canada must account for these experiments. This

recognition is important to the ongoing work of reconciliation between our people and Canada.”

“Extreme hunger and deliberate food denial punishments are shared experiences for many residential school survivors and this research and the media flurry around this work has opened up painful memories and hurt for many of our people,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “We are compelled to take every single opportunity to tell the truth – it is critically important that our people and indeed all Canadians understand this shamefully disturbing history resonates today just as it did when these disturbing incidents took place. For the sake of our families, the truth must be told to reach a sense of closure and lasting reconciliation.”

“Although the 2008 Indian residential school apology exists as a broad acknowledgement of historic wrongs, this recent research fuels the frustration among our Nuuchahnulth people with the lack of action and lack of commitment on the part of Canada to work in real partnership with our peoples and governments,” said Clifford Atleo, President of Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council. “There is an outstanding requirement for all governments and all Canadians to commit to reconciliation,” he concluded.

The Alberni Residential School in BC, located on Tseshaht First Nation lands, was one of the residential schools cited in Mosby's research. "Tseshaht and other Aboriginal children became guinea pigs for the Federal Government," said Chief Councillor Hugh Braker, Tseshaht First Nation. "Our children were helpless victims for the government's biomedical experiments and this shocking treatment cannot be swept under the rug or ignored. We need to understand exactly what happened, who knew about it, who authorized it and what the effects were."

The BC Chiefs' Caucus present at the Assembly of First Nations 34th Annual General Assembly resolved, yesterday, to bring forward a related emergency resolution for consideration of the Chiefs in Assembly. This resolution has been drafted and will come to the floor today, July 18, 2013.

For more information and further comment:

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