

First Nations Summit

STATEMENT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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First Nations Summit Chiefs in Assembly Statement on the resignation of Puglaas, Jody Wilson-Raybould

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver, BC — BC First Nations leaders, gathered today at the Musqueam Community Centre for the February 2019 First Nations Summit Chiefs meeting, issued the following statement in response to yesterday's resignation from Cabinet by Puglaas, the Hon. Jody Wilson Raybould, from her position as the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

In 2015, we were very pleased when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed Puglaas, Jody Wilson-Raybould, as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. We celebrated her important achievement of becoming the first Indigenous woman to ever hold these significant Cabinet portfolios. Indigenous people across Canada were buoyed with her appointment, as it represented the possibility of a radical shift in the Crown-Indigenous relationship, a change unlike any other in recent history. It was the appointment of Puglaas that reflected Prime Minister Trudeau's solemn commitment to fundamental change and his vision for true reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. It was one of the few moments in the history of Canada in which we as Indigenous Peoples believed that a Canadian government had finally recognized the importance of having Indigenous voices at the Cabinet table. However, the events that have occurred over the past two weeks have now given us great pause going forward.

In all of his mandate letters, and again in his statement of June 21, 2017, Prime Minister Trudeau stated that, "No relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples.". It bears noting that any positive changes to the troubled Crown-Indigenous Nations relationship have been gradual and have not come easily.

The troubling events of the past several days and the recent adverse treatment faced by Puglaas, do not reflect Canada's professed commitment to advancing reconciliation. If anything, it is the very opposite. The situation raises serious concerns about the future direction of the Liberal government, the commitments to reconciliation through transformative change and the overall state of the Crown-Indigenous relationship going forward. The next few months leading to the 2019 Federal election will define if the current government remains dedicated to these commitments.

The definition of the term *'speaking truth to power'* is said to be *'believing deeply in what you say, taking risks and fighting every day to be heard; a powerful nonviolent challenge to injustices'*. This is the essence of our friend and colleague Puglaas, Jody Wilson-Raybould and the way she carried herself as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada over the past three and a half years, as well as her short term as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

We sincerely thank Puglaas for being a powerful Indigenous leader, for bringing honour, integrity and a strong voice to the offices she has held, and for being a steadfast advocate to effect positive change for all Indigenous peoples in this country. We will continue to stand with her in the days and weeks ahead.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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