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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First Nations Chiefs unite to give rise to Indigenous Child at the Centre Action Plan

Coast Salish Territory/ North Vancouver –First Nations Chiefs from across B.C. gathered at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre in North Vancouver this week to affirm their commitment to secure the individual and collective survival, dignity, and well being of First Nations children. The result was the One Heart, One Mind Statement of Solidarity and Cooperation. Through this, Chiefs have given overwhelming support to the Indigenous Child at the Centre Action Plan. The Plan will support First Nations in their efforts to design, deliver, and evaluate programs and services for our children, families, communities, and Indigenous Nations in a way that is consistent with our common cultural beliefs and systems that improves our overall quality of life.

"With 203 different First Nations across the province, we are a diverse people. Each community knows what is best for their children", said B.C. Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo). "What has been accomplished here is a sense of unity and support for each community driven process to secure the health and well being of our children and ensure they remain connected to their families, communities, and Indigenous Nations."

An interim Child and Wellness Council has been established to gather further input for the Child at the Centre Action Plan to ensure it reflects the knowledge of front line workers, youth, the community and leadership. The Council will then develop a workplan to advance and implement the Child at the Centre Action Plan.

"Nothing is more important to our communities than for our children to be given the best environment in which to grow, thrive and prosper," said Chief Ed John, First Nations Summit Task Group member. "It was a momentous occasion to see our many First Nations communities come together, set aside differences, and commit to putting our children at the centre."

"We recently watched the Prime Minister make a long awaited apology to victims of Canada's Residential Schools. It was a welcome gesture which will begin to heal the lasting effects of the schools," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "But it is only the first step of a larger journey. We've taken a very historic step this week in the long road to heal our communities and provide a bright future for our children. We trust the Governments of BC and Canada will join us," he added.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

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One Heart, One Mind: Statement of Solidarity & Cooperation

WHEREAS the Aboriginal Nations have an inherent right of self-determination including jurisdiction relating to the children and families of those Nations;

WHEREAS Indigenous People have the Right to Self-Determination and the Right to Survival, Dignity and Well-Being.

WHEREAS our children and our families are our foundation now and in the future. They must be honored, respected, and recognized for their inherent value regardless of age, gender, circumstance, ability, sexual orientation, residency or Nationhood.

WHEREAS the negative impacts of colonization, separation from family and community, past and present Federal and Provincial policies, regulations, Acts and legislation must be addressed through lasting, culturally appropriate solutions that are community driven.

WHEREAS Aboriginal People as defined by Section 35 of the Constitution of Canada recognize that our children and families are the cornerstone of our Nations.

WHEREAS despite the geographic challenges, cultural diversity, and mainstream systemic barriers, we assert that "we are all here to stay."

WHEREAS we embrace the following principles to ensure we are successful in our endeavors:

- 1) Our children are sacred.
- 2) Aboriginal children are connected to their families, extended families, communities and Indigenous Nations and have a right to understand, respect and honor their own identity.
- 3) That relationships are built upon mutual trust, transparency, openness, respect and accountability.
- 4) We have a shared responsibility to ensure our children, families and communities are held central to our present and future as Aboriginal people.
- 5) Decision making must be informed by, and in the context of, our Aboriginal communities.
- 6) That differing views contribute to the process and we are committed to working through issues on a consensus building model for the greater good of our children.
- 7) We realize that holistic, culturally grounded approaches are crucial to achieving the balance required for healthy and effective relationships at the individual, family, community and governance levels.

WHEREAS to bring positive change and to advance our common purpose:

- 1) Our jurisdiction over the health and well-being for Aboriginal children and families is acknowledged, respected and honored.
- 2) The interests of all Aboriginal people are considered in decision-making.
- 3) Our unique identities are respected, while pursuing collective goals.
- 4) The protection and integrity of our inherent connection to our land and resources is important for the vested interest of our future generations.

- 5) That administration and delivery for the health and well-being of our children at the local, regional, provincial and national levels is coordinated to maximize efficiency and ensure success without compromising quality or accountability.
- 6) Fair and equitable access to opportunities exists for Aboriginal stakeholders that have a vested interest in the future of our children and families.
- 7) That self-sufficiency for Aboriginal families and communities will be the constant underlying objective in our mission to effect positive change.

WHEREAS our voices are unified in our pursuit of the individual and collective survival, dignity and well-being of our children, families, communities, and Indigenous Nations and agree that:

- 1) The Rights of the Child are paramount and protected;
- 2) The Right of Indigenous families and communities retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people, will be upheld.
- 3) We will come together as Indigenous peoples to exercise our Right to assume responsibility for the safety, survival, dignity and well-being of our children through the design, delivery and evaluation of programs and services for our children and families.
- 4) We will seek the resources necessary to build capacity where needed and to address gaps in services with a view to long term sustainability.

WHEREAS the Residential School Apology made by the Government of Canada makes the following recognitions:

- ? Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.
- ? These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal.
- ? Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child."
- ? Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.
- ? The government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities.
- ? The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.
- ? The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT we affirm our commitment made on November 29, 2007 to the '*All Our Relations*' A Declaration of the Sovereign Indigenous Nations of British Columbia and on January 25, 2008 to the '*Walking Together to Keep Indigenous Children at the Centre*' Declaration of Commitment.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT we the undersigned commit to working in Solidarity and Cooperation to design, deliver and evaluate programs and services for our children, families, communities, and Indigenous Nations in a way that is consistent with our common cultural beliefs and systems that improves our overall quality of life.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT qualified support for the Indigenous Child at the Centre Action Plan will require further opportunity for input into the Action Plan through engagement at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit and BC Assembly of First Nations meetings.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT we commit to the establishment of an Interim Chiefs Child and Family Wellness Council that will take primary responsibility to:

- ? Amend the Indigenous Child at the Centre Action Plan to reflect input from community, front-line workers and leadership;
- ? Develop a workplan to advance and implement the Indigenous Child at the Centre Action Plan; and
- ? Develop the Terms of Reference for the First Nations Child and Family Wellness Council.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT we commit to working with an Indigenous Child at the Centre Caucus, to be developed, to promote unity, communication, collaboration and cooperation for the health and well-being of our children.

FINALLY BE IT RESOLVED THAT as Indigenous People, bound by One Heart and One Mind, we affirm our commitment, our unity, and our moral, spiritual, traditional, and political accountability to work together in a Nation-to-Nation and community-driven process to secure the individual and collective survival, dignity and well-being of our children.

Signed this 23rd day of July, 2008.