



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First Nations Leadership Council expresses concern about the disappearances and murders of young women on the Highway of Tears

Coast Salish Traditional Territory/Vancouver, BC – On behalf of all First Nations in British Columbia, the First Nations Leadership Council expresses deepest condolences and sympathies to the family, friends, and community of 14 year-old Aielah Katherina Saric, whose body was discovered near Prince George on Highway 16, also known as the “Highway of Tears”.

“The First Nations Leadership Council also expresses condolences and sympathies to all the family members of at least nine young women who have gone missing or been murdered since 1990 along the same highway, as this incident surely serves as a reminder of their on-going loss and pain,” said BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Shawn Atleo.

The First Nations Leadership Council shares the concerns of First Nations, local organizations, and RCMP officers who have speculated that some of these cases may be connected, emphasizing that all of the women are between the ages of 14 and 25, and all but one are aboriginal. In a letter to the RCMP on Friday February 17th, the First Nations Leadership Council called for a more coordinated approach to these investigations, highlighting the benefits of combining the expertise of all past and present RCMP officers that have been working these cases individually, and of pooling all available resources in a concerted effort.

“No one wants to repeat the mistakes of the investigations into the missing and murdered women on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver,” said Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “The lessons learned from that tragedy – namely, the benefits of a coordinated approach and of the swift and dedicated response of law enforcement on behalf of all British Columbians, regardless of race or socio-economic circumstances – could yield positive results for the Highway of Tears investigations.”

The First Nations Leadership Council and the RCMP signed a *Public Safety Cooperation Protocol* in October 2005, demonstrating the intent of First Nations and law enforcement to develop their relationship through mutual respect and trust and outline strategies to address community safety issues.

“In the spirit of the recent *Protocol*, the First Nations Leadership Council is confident that the RCMP is willing to examine options to strengthen their response to these incidents, thus preventing similar tragedies and providing answers and peace of mind to the grieving families,” concluded Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit Task Group.

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

For more information:

BC Regional Chief Shawn Atleo, BC AFN (604) 220-5822

Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC, (250) 490-5314

Grand Chief Edward John, FNS, (604) 926-9903