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## **ABORIGINAL GROUPS SLAM POLICE AND JUSTICE SYSTEM**

### **Call for Independent Review of RCMP Conduct and Independent Review of Death in Custody**

**Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver)** – The First Nations Summit (FNS), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) and the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC (NCCABC) today expressed shock and outrage at the RCMP beating of a 17 year old handcuffed aboriginal girl in Williams Lake and an aboriginal death in custody in Prince George.

The groups are also expressing their support for the Gitksan in calling for action by the Solicitor General of Canada following a coroner's inquest into the 2009 shooting of Rodney Jackson by the RCMP.

#### ***WILLIAMS LAKE POLICE BEATING***

In Williams Lake, a 17 year old aboriginal girl says she was seriously assaulted by RCMP officers while she was handcuffed in a police vehicle. She suffered serious facial wounds after being punched repeatedly by the RCMP.

The NCCABC expressed shock and outrage at this incident and again calls for a truly 'independent' review of the police conduct.

"Having the police investigate themselves is not sufficient", Hugh Braker, NCCABC President said. "We saw what happened in Prince George after the police tasered an 11 year old aboriginal child. A closed door investigation was done and a one sentence decision announced. The aboriginal community has no confidence in closed door, in house investigations. We are tired of the RCMP investigating themselves or being investigated by other police," he added.

The NCCABC has received many complaints about the police and Justice system in Williams Lake. It is time there was a thorough review the Aboriginal groups maintain.

"The NCCABC has **NO** faith in any investigation of the RCMP in Williams Lake by another RCMP officer. It **MUST** be independent. It is up to the Solicitor General of Canada to ensure the public maintains confidence in the RCMP and the Justice system and he can only do that by ordering an independent review," Braker said.

The Aboriginal groups have demanded that the Solicitor General of Canada consult with aboriginal groups **BEFORE** appointing an independent reviewer of police conduct.

“Governments must appoint individuals in whom we have faith and must ensure inquiries have proper terms of reference and the necessary authority,” BCAFN Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould said.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the UBCIC also called for an immediate independent review. “There are two distinct justice systems in BC; one for aboriginals and one for everyone else,” he said. “As a father and grandfather, I am sickened and disgusted to learn that a 17 year old girl was handcuffed in the back of a police vehicle and then suffered such horrific injuries after being brutally and repeatedly punched by the arresting police officer,” he added. “My shock turned to rage when I was told the young girl wasn’t even taken to the hospital by the RCMP and instead had to wait for her mother to take her the next day when she was released from custody uncharged.”

### ***PRINCE GEORGE DEATH IN CUSTODY***

A second aboriginal from Williams Lake, a 19 year old male, died in the Prince George Regional Remand Centre, earlier this week, shortly after being transferred there from the Williams Lake court and after he had been arrested in Williams Lake.

“Far too many aboriginal people die while in custody in BC. Statistics in a recent study by the NCCABC have shown that the numbers of aboriginal people dying in custody in this province is grossly disproportionate. For the aboriginal public to maintain confidence in the system there must be an independent inquiry into this death”, said Chief Doug White of the First Nations Summit political executive. “There are clearly systemic issues at play, of which these deaths and beatings are only the tip of the iceberg and symptoms of a justice system gone horribly wrong. While investigations into individual incidents are important, it is also critical to launch a global inquiry into these systemic problems.”

BCAFN Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould said, “It is time for the Solicitor General of BC to take a hard look at aboriginal people and the Justice system in central and northern BC. We have already had inquiries into this problem and the Solicitor General needs to take appropriate action and institute necessary changes to policy and ensure policing reform.”

### ***CORONER’S INQUEST INTO RODNEY JACKSON SHOOTING***

The aboriginal groups also announced their full support for the Gitksan’s call for Canada’s Solicitor General to take action following the coroner’s inquest into the 2009 RCMP shooting of Rodney Jackson.

“It is obvious from the Coroner’s inquest testimony that this action by the RCMP was at best ill planned and, at worst, negligent,” Regional Chief Wilson-Raybould said. “In light of the inquest testimony the Solicitor General of Canada needs to look at this shooting again and make changes.”

The FNS, BCAFN, UBCIC and NCCABC also lent their support to the Gitksan Nation.

“Aboriginal people said in 2009 that there had to be an independent investigation of this shooting,” Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit political executive said. “And this inquest just confirms that. We seriously doubt the motives of the police in this matter and we seriously question the honesty of some of their inquest testimony.”

"Astonishingly, earlier this month in Northern BC, while the coroner's inquest into Rodney Jackson was in session, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was hearing first-hand accounts from First Nations citizens of RCMP indifference. As well, the West Vancouver Police hosted a press conference in Prince George where they released their findings exonerating the RCMP's use of a taser on a 11 year old Aboriginal boy. Something is wrong with the picture." said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip. "The Union of BC Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit and the BC Assembly of First Nations signed in good faith a Public Safety Protocol with the RCMP. The spirit and intent of the Safety Protocol is to ensure the safety of all citizens, aboriginal or not."

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