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Press Release

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FNLCC Condemns Ongoing and Persistent Racism in BC

(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLCC) is deeply concerned about the outright display of continued and persistent racism as seen in recent high-profile incidents including, but not limited to, the arrest of a First Nations Elder, Maxwell Johnson, and his 12 year old granddaughter at a Vancouver branch of the Bank of Montreal, and the troubling position Candice Servatius attempted to advance in School District 70 to disallow education about Nuuchahnulth culture and ceremony in the school system.

Of particular concern is the extent to which the Canadian justice system is being used to oppress and intimidate First Nations peoples in British Columbia. The social and financial costs of this continued insensitivity and ignorance about First Nations peoples, their cultures, and their languages significantly hinder and stall reconciliation.

“All British Columbians must step up and work together to end racism. The best hope we have is to take steps to stop normalizing racist attitudes and actions towards First Nations children, families and communities, and create a more equal and just society where everyone can thrive and be healthy,” stated BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee.

“The multilevel racial profiling experienced by Mr. Johnson and his granddaughter is abhorrent and has no place in any aspect of our society. It is extremely disappointing and concerning that situations like this can arise. Unfortunately, this provides a clear illustration as to why we need to continue to pursue reconciliation efforts through means such as the implementation of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the TRC Calls to Action to ensure the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples in BC”, said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Political Executive.

“Indigenous peoples continue to face the debilitating and destructive effects of a colonial legacy of discrimination and violence. Addressing the nasty and persistent colonial hangover necessitates a concerted effort to address racism, both systemic and institutional, as well as societal. We are standing in solidarity with Mr. Johnson and his granddaughter and all Indigenous peoples continuing to experience racism,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Maxwell Johnson, a member of the Heiltsuk Nation, attended his Dec. 20, 2019 meeting at BMO's Burrard Street location in downtown Vancouver, where he tried to open an account for his 12-year-old granddaughter. The BMO staff member, concerned they were committing fraud, called the police and the two customers were arrested. What happened to Johnson is part of what is called a rise in "commercial racial profiling". A pattern of behaviour is observed where a person of colour is treated rather with a lack of respect, a lack of professional courtesy, and an automatic assumption of guilt and criminal activity.

In Nanaimo, Justice Douglas Thompson recently released his 47-page ruling on *Servatius v. Alberni School District No. 70* - and intervenor Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. During the five-day trial held Nov. 18 - 22, 2019 the court heard testimony from several witnesses to a school event that featured an Indigenous smudging demonstration for children attending John Howitt Elementary School in Port Alberni in September 2015. Candice Servatius alleged her two children were forced to participate in the event. Significantly, Servatius argued that the school district's use of Indigenous practices is comparable to the residential school system - a grossly contorted comparison to the past cultural genocide inflicted on Indigenous peoples in Canada.

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