

# First Nations Summit

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
AUGUST 31, 2022**

## STATEMENT

### **Appointment of first Indigenous jurist to Supreme Court of Canada a momentous step in the right direction**

**(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh), Vancouver, British Columbia** – The First Nations Summit congratulates Madame Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin on her recent appointment as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC).

When Justice O'Bonsawin, Canada's first Indigenous appointee, begins her new role on the SCC bench on September 1<sup>st</sup>, it will be a momentous occasion and will mark a significant and progressive milestone for Canada, and particularly for Indigenous people.

For decades, Indigenous people have been forced to resort to the courts in order to protect and preserve our rights and title. Unfortunately, there has been a profound disconnect between the Court and Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

In particular, the Supreme Court has struggled to fully understand the spirituality and essence of Indigenous peoples, the need to protect and preserve our cultures, our spiritual beliefs, sacred sites connected to those beliefs and the non-western ways in which Indigenous spirituality is manifested. This disconnect stems from a justice system built from colonial laws and worldviews with an inherent inability to view and evaluate issues through an Indigenous lens. We sincerely hope that Justice O'Bonsawin's appointment will lead to a positive shift in this regard and that she can, in part, be a conduit for meaningful understandings and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives by the Court.

Canada's justice system has historically had a bias against Indigenous peoples. The damaging results have led to Indigenous peoples in British Columbia, and across Canada, being disproportionately and negatively impacted by the justice system, often with devastating consequences for individuals, families, communities, Nations, and society at large.

Constructive and important efforts have been made over many decades to improve the experiences of Indigenous peoples with the justice system, and some important steps have taken place in BC, including the creation of the BC First Nations Justice Council and the development of the BC First Nations Justice Plan, which we hope will assist in leading to systemic change. Justice O'Bonsawin's appointment, and hopefully future Indigenous appointments to the Court, will keep us moving in the right direction.

We wish Justice O'Bonsawin well in her new role with Canada's top court.

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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 information on the First Nations Summit may be found at [www.fns.bc.ca](http://www.fns.bc.ca).*

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