



MEDIA ADVISORY OF PRESS CONFERENCE ON JANUARY 15, 2020

Legal Complaints Filed Against RCMP Exclusion Zone in Wet'suwet'en; Indigenous, Civil liberties, Human Rights & Labour Groups Condemn Exclusion Zone

Tuesday January 14, 2020

For immediate release

VANCOUVER, Coast Salish Territories – The Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Civil Liberties Association, British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union, and Professor Margot Young from the UBC Allard School of Law will be speaking at a press conference at **UBCIC office, 312 Main Street, 4th floor boardroom, on Wednesday January 15, 2020 at 1 pm** regarding the RCMP Exclusion Zone established at the 27km mark on the Morrice Forest Service Road West in Wet'suwet'en territories.

According to UBCIC Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, "We expect the provincial government and BC RCMP to honour the Supreme Court of Canada's precedent-setting *Delgamuukw/Gisday'way* case and the *United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples* in all their decisions and actions. For Wet'suwet'en people to be denied access to their own territories as a result of a police exclusion zone smacks of outright racism and the colonial-era pass system sanctioned by the so-called rule of law, which our people survived for far too long."

The BCCLA is filing legal complaints for Delee Alexis Nikal and Cody Thomas Merriman (Wedlidi) to the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP. Both Nikal and Merriman were separately bringing food and emergency supplies but were denied entry and access at the RCMP exclusion zone, in contravention of the RCMP's own statements and Nikal and Merriman's inherent Indigenous and *Charter*-protected rights.

"We are extremely concerned about the use of exclusion zones prohibiting Wet'suwet'en people, the public, and media from accessing Wet'suwet'en territories. The Wet'suwet'en assert continuous jurisdiction and unextinguished rights and land title, and the *Charter* protects liberty, mobility, freedom of the press, and the right not to be arbitrarily detained. This exclusion zone constitutes a serious violation of both the Indigenous rights and *Charter*-protected rights of Wet'suwet'en people and their family members," states **Harsha Walia, Executive Director of the BC Civil Liberties Association.**

"As a trade union committed to supporting the full implementation of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the recommendations of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, we are deeply troubled by the use of exclusion

zones prohibiting access to Wet'suwet'en territories," says **Paul Finch, BCGEU Treasurer**. "It's imperative that the RCMP, Coastal Gaslink and the provincial government work with the Wet'suwet'en clan and elected leadership to resolve the current dispute in the spirit of the principles articulated in those documents."

The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs have submitted a formal request to the United Nations, following the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's call for Canada to uphold free, prior, and informed consent. **Constitutional legal expert and Professor at UBC's Allard School of Law, Margot Young**, states, "International law is absolutely central to resolution of this situation. All levels of government are bound by treaties signed by Canada, and Canadian constitutional law is to be informed by these human rights obligations. United Nations concerns are not to be lightly cast aside."

Media inquiries:

Delee Alexis Nikal, Gidimt'en Clan, Wet'suwet'en: 250-961-9642

Cody Thomas Merriman (Wedlidi), Haida: 250-877-2438

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC: 250-490-5314

Harsha Walia, Executive Director, BCCLA: 778-885-0040

Professor Margot Young, Professor in the UBC Allard School of Law: 778-926-6990

British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union: communications@bcgeu.ca

Press conference details:

WHEN: Wednesday January 15, 2020
1:00 PM P.S.T.

WHERE: Union of BC Indian Chiefs boardroom
4th floor- 312 Main Street (entrance on Cordova)