

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
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OPEN LETTER: Plecas Review Must be Withdrawn and RCY Recommendations Fully Implemented

Dear Premier Clark and Minister Cadieux:

Two reports were released this week that touch on the lives of Aboriginal children and youth. One was written by a Justice and will transform Canada's relationship with Aboriginal peoples. The other by a government insider, flippantly dismisses the value of reports written by Justices, and similarly dismisses Aboriginal peoples, taking as its incomprehensible premise that kids will die, and that this is just the collateral damage we should expect in a system that the Government has starved and ignored.

The problem is, that the kids who die in care every year, like the 90 deaths already reported this year have critical commonalities: they are mostly Aboriginal and they have bounced through child welfare without anyone hearing their stories or finding the time to listen or tell these in a way that builds change. They are tough stories, like Paige Gauthier and Alex Gervais, which sent shockwaves across the Province as people digested the instability and professional indifference our children experience while in government care, but these stories have to come out if we want change.

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is among the most important, far-reaching, and profound documents ever produced about Aboriginal Peoples. Driven by the leadership of Justice Murray Sinclair, it documents one of the darkest episodes in Canadian history that saw thousands of our children seized, abused, and killed. As Prime Minister Trudeau observed, the report will change Canada - both through the comprehensive implementation of all of its 94 calls to action, and by transforming how we learn, talk, and relate to one another. We note that the first five calls to action address child welfare, and importantly, that the first recommendation calls upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care and sets out clear steps for this to take place.

The other report - Plecas Review, Part One: Decision Time, commissioned by the Christy Clark government and written by a former provincial bureaucrat - is the polar opposite of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. In the way it was produced and in its content, it harkens to another era when our children were forcibly removed from their homes and put into the residential school system, and where our land was taken and our culture was outlawed, with our well-being a distant thought.

Decision Time proposes sweeping changes to child welfare in this province, including ending vital independent oversight. These recommendations were developed with no engagement of First Nations, despite the fact that fully 60 per cent of the children in care in British Columbia are Aboriginal.

Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, we are all collectively saying "never again" regarding harm and risk to children, and the federal government under Prime Minister Trudeau, is hearing us and has committed to action. In contrast, at the same time, the Christy Clark government appears through Decision Time to instead say 'it will always be.'

We cannot overstate that not a single one of our children is disposable, and we take great offense at the casual suggestion by Mr. Plecas that we must simply accept and normalize the deaths of any of our children.

Decision Time appears to us as a cynical political effort by the Christy Clark government to move the disturbing truth concerning the condition of Aboriginal children back into the shadows. Through the efforts of our communities, as well as the Representative for Children and Youth, the reality our Peoples face has entered the minds of the public and resulted in growing calls for action. Having a government insider write a report that tries to end oversight and hinder the growth of a desperately needed culture of accountability is absolutely unacceptable.

It is 2015. Reports such as Decision Time speak to a bygone era that the federal government and growing numbers of Canadians and British Columbians reject. The Christy Clark government needs to show that it stands up for Aboriginal children and youth and shelve Decision Time. Further, we call on the Premier to implement all of the Representative for Children and Youth's outstanding recommendations, including her recommendations for increased funding and supports to the child welfare system.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



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