

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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Via email: president@whitehouse.gov

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House of Commons 1600
Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6
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Via email: pm@pm.gc.ca

June 25, 2018

OPEN LETTER: UBCIC Condemns Child Detention and Family Separation

Dear President Trump and Prime Minister Trudeau,

We are writing on behalf of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). Based in British Columbia, Canada we are an advocacy organization founded in 1969, advancing Indigenous Title and Rights and Treaty Rights on behalf of Indigenous peoples, mandated by our member Nations.

We have seen the horrifying pictures and listened to the audio recordings of immigrant and refugee children being torn from their families and jailed south of the medicine line. We fully condemn this atrocious state-sanctioned violence that is being perpetuated against immigrant children and families under President Trump's administration.

For many of us, this is reminiscent of U.S. and Canadian policies of Indian Residential School and Indian Boarding Schools, where Indigenous children were kidnapped and forcibly separated from their families and communities. The States of Canada and the U.S.A and the Church committed acts of genocide as defined by the *United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. As Indigenous Peoples we have endured and survived, yet this continues today with policies of child apprehension that break our families and Nations across our lands.

The UBCIC recognizes and affirms the importance of standing with and supporting Indigenous peoples internationally. Our hearts break for the many Maya, Aztec, Zapotec, Olmec Indigenous children who are being jailed in child camps simply for traveling through their own traditional territories and those of their relatives. This is a violation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* and the denial of inherent Indigenous rights to the land that Indigenous peoples have inhabited since time immemorial. The UBCIC is aware

of numerous instances of Indigenous families being torn apart due to Canadian and American immigration policies. Immigration officers routinely detain and deport spouses who are married into our Indigenous nations. This is a violation of our Indigenous rights and our own customary marriage and adoption laws.

The Government of Canada's recent *Report on First Nation border crossing issues* details how Indigenous people in Canada are negatively impacted by colonial border policies: "First Nations therefore view the imposition of the Canada-US border, which in some cases literally divided their existing nations in two, as an unjustified and unlawful abridgement of their inherent rights which have a direct relation to their cultural survival... [T]he normal flow of family and cultural practices as well as of governmental and membership alliances has been disrupted by current immigration rules."

We oppose President Trump's recent Executive Order claiming to stop this horror. The Executive Order continues the "zero-tolerance policy" that criminalizes anyone who crosses the border without legal papers, including those seeking asylum. It does not end child imprisonment - it just means that the U.S will now imprison children in the same camp as their parents. This is also what Canada does. In 2016-2017, Canada jailed 162 minors in detention facilities.

We echo the call for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to immediately withdraw from the Safe Third Country Agreement that prohibits asylum-seekers from the U.S from seeking safety in Canada. The UBCIC will not stand idly by while devastating and irreparable harm is being committed to children and families. We stand with our allies like No One Is Illegal on both sides of the medicine line and will continue to apply pressure to stop this gross injustice.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President



Chief Robert Chamberlin
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
Honourable Ahmed D. Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Honourable Jenny Kwan, Critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Premier John Horgan
Honourable Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
UBCIC Chiefs Council
First Nations Summit
BC Assembly of First Nations