



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Civil Liberties and Indigenous Rights Groups Call on CRCC to Immediately Take Conduct of Investigation into Wet'suwet'en Land Defender's Police Complaint

VANCOUVER/ (X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), S^kw^xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔ/ səliłwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) territories, August 27, 2020 –BC Civil Liberties Association and Union of BC Indian Chiefs are calling on the Chairperson of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP (CRCC) to immediately take charge of the investigation of a Wet'suwet'en land defender's police complaint.

According to **Mr. Cody Merriman (Wedlidi)**, “I made a police complaint to the CRCC because I was expecting an independent and civilian investigation into the illegal RCMP exclusion zone on Wet'suwet'en territories as part of the militarized raids on the yintah in January 2020. Instead, I have had the very same RCMP officers who were involved in leading the police operations show up unannounced to my home, claim they are the ones ‘informally resolving’ my police complaint against other officers, and try to intimidate me to drop the complaint.”

“Indigenous peoples have always asserted our laws and presence on our territories, but I was denied access to my wife and family's territories, Gidimt'en yintah, which was subjected to militarized police operations and an exclusion zone earlier this year. Now, we can't even get a proper and independent investigation into the illegal police misconduct and criminalization of Indigenous people. This is outrageous,” further states **Mr. Merriman**.

On January 15 2020, Mr. Cody Merriman filed a police complaint with the CRCC. Mr. Merriman was bringing food and emergency supplies to the Gidimt'en Checkpoint on Wet'suwet'en territories but was denied entry and access at the RCMP exclusion zone, in contravention of the RCMP's own statements and Merriman's inherent Indigenous and *Charter*-protected rights.

In May 2020, two RCMP officers arrived unannounced at Mr. Merriman's home. The officers were unclear about the nature of their visit, and proceeded to interrogate and intimidate Mr. Merriman about his police complaint. In a subsequent letter in June 2020, the RCMP argued that two of the officers in Mr. Merriman's complaint were Reserve Constables and would not be included in the complaint investigation, even though Reservists are appointed under the *RCMP Act* and fall under the jurisdiction of the CRCC.

On August 26, 2020, Mr. Merriman filed a second complaint with the CRCC, highlighting the fundamental flaws in the RCMP investigation into his initial police complaint.

According to **Carly Teillet**, BCCLA Community Lawyer, “Individual RCMP officers and the Smithers RCMP Detachment involved in leading RCMP militarized actions on Wet’suwet’en territories and subject to a policy complaint to the CRCC should not be investigating Mr. Merriman’s complaint. This is a clear conflict of interest. We call on the CRCC Chairperson to immediately take conduct of the complaint investigation from the RCMP. We further call on the CRCC to include the conduct of the two reserve constables in the complaint investigation.”

“At a time of increased public scrutiny about police violence and lack of police accountability, it is reprehensible that Indigenous people who were subjected to one of the largest police operations in this province are being informed that they have to undergo an ‘informal dispute resolution’ with the RCMP and that certain officers are magically immune from investigation. This is not accountability and this is not justice for illegal and colonial police violence on unceded lands,” says **Grand Chief Stewart Phillip**, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Media inquiries:

Cody Merriman (Wedlidi): 250-877-2438

Carly Teillet, BCCLA Community Lawyer: 778-987-9268

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