

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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May 29, 2020

Honourable David Lametti  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada  
Via Email: [minister-ministre@justice.gc.ca](mailto:minister-ministre@justice.gc.ca); [david.lametti@parl.gc.ca](mailto:david.lametti@parl.gc.ca)

**Re: Strengthening and Advancing Human Rights Oversight of COVID-19 Responses in Canada**

Dear Minister Lametti,

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) writes in follow up to the joint statement issued by Amnesty International on April 15, 2020 that we endorsed alongside hundreds of other organizations and experts across Canada. While we acknowledge the federal government's supportive response and dialogue around our call for federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to institute or strengthen human rights oversight of their responses to COVID-19, we are worried by the lack of current progress made to address the concerns we raised.

In light of the socioeconomic destabilization and new challenges incited by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is absolutely crucial that the integrity of Canada's human rights framework and obligations, as well its commitment to implement the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, is not undermined or relegated. It is equally important that governments and businesses do not take advantage of this unpredictable time of limitations, shifting priorities, and distracted public awareness to push forward with agendas that fundamentally imperil the rights and welfare of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized and racialized peoples.

We point to the human rights violations that were previously highlighted by UBCIC and Amnesty International in regard to the Tiny House Warriors and other Indigenous land, environmental, cultural, and human rights defenders who continue to experience harassment, surveillance, and violence in the assertion of their Title and Rights. The stark reality is that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting and exacerbating the disenfranchisement Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, people with living with

disabilities, and other vulnerable communities experience. We reiterate and renew our call for governments to address and identify human rights gaps in their responses to COVID-19, to establish independent human rights oversight committees that include Indigenous representation, and to enable Indigenous participation in decision-making related to COVID-19 responses.

UBCIC will continue to be a staunch proponent for human rights oversight and the safeguarding of Indigenous Title and Rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. We urgently call upon you and the government of Canada to not lose the momentum to implement the changes need to transform and reform Canada's human rights landscape into one that sets a strong example to other countries. As time is of the essence, we urge you to meet with a representative group of stakeholders and experts at the earliest possible date to initiate the action needed to address COVID-19 without compromising human rights.

**On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS**



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip  
President



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CC: Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada  
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