

UBCIC and Heiltsuk Nation Announce Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond to Intervene in BC Human Rights Case Against Vancouver Police Department Over Racial Profiling and Wrongful Detainment

Indigenous leaders release security camera footage of detainment and reject VPD's "colour-blind" statement of defence.

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA (June 16, 2021) – The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) and Heiltsuk Nation announced today that Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, former judge and Senior Associate Counsel with Woodward & Company, will be applying to intervene on behalf of UBCIC in an ongoing BC human rights case against the VPD for the wrongful detainment of Maxwell Johnson and his granddaughter, outside a bank in Vancouver in December of 2019.

In making the announcement, the leaders also released security camera video of the detainment, which shows that after a bank employee called 911 in response to suspicions of fraud, Max and his granddaughter – both members of the Heiltsuk Nation - were detained, brought out onto a busy downtown sidewalk, separated from one another, handcuffed, and searched: <https://vimeo.com/548569834/d917c96bdf>

"This intervention is about supporting a complaint that aims to fight systemic racism, hold institutions accountable, and offer redress for the racial profiling and wrongful detainment that Max and his granddaughter experienced at the hands of the VPD," said Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. "This case embodies the systemic racism that we must all work together to eliminate."

"We welcome today's important intervention by UBCIC and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond," said Marilyn Slett, Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Nation. "This case has become a symbol of the fight against systemic racism in Canada, and we must all work together to hold institutions to account, and make sure this never happens again."

The leaders also released a copy of the VPD's statement of defence, and rejected its claim that officers were unaware of the pair's Indigenous identity before detaining them.

"We completely reject the VPD's colour-blind statement of defence, which is tone deaf and fails to acknowledge or address the systemic racism that Indigenous people like Max and his granddaughter, experience every day at the hands of police," said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip. "Institutionalized racism and unchecked police violence deny dignity and justice, and destroy lives - from unlawful detainments to deaths in custody. We remember Dale Culver, an unarmed Indigenous man who died in Prince George while being arrested by five RCMP officers in 2017. We remember Chantel Moore of Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation who was fatally shot five times by a police officer who was later placed on administrative leave. If justice is to be attainable, the VPD must be held accountable for any violations of human and Indigenous rights and set an example for other law enforcement agencies and institutions. The VPD must apologize for this incident, compensate the victims, and vastly improve its cultural competency training and anti-racism education."

To help fight racism and to fundraise for the legal challenge, Maxwell Johnson and the Heiltsuk Nation have launched an anti-racism campaign titled, [Strong as Cedar](#), inviting others to share their experiences of systemic racism in Canada.

“Today, we are asking people from all walks of life to come together to help us fight systemic racism,” said Maxwell Johnson. “By sharing our stories, we can hold police to account, and make sure everyone feels safe. It doesn’t matter what colour you are - we are all one.”

Supporting video & documents:

- [Security Camera Footage of Detainment](#)
- [Backgrounder on Human Rights Case](#)
- [Human Rights Tribunal Complaint](#)
- [VPD Statement of Defence](#)

For more information:

To arrange interviews with Chief Marilyn Slett or Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, please contact Andrew Frank, Heiltsuk Tribal Communications: 604-367-2112

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