

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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## Press Release

June 24, 2021

### UBCIC Remembers and Honours Hereditary Chief Ron George (Tsaskiy)

((X<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy<sup>ə</sup>m (Musqueam), Sk<sup>w</sup>xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsilil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – June 24, 2021) It is with profound sadness that the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) marks the passing of Ron George. A Hereditary Chief, Tsaskiy, of Wet'suwet'en descent, Ron was a prolific lifelong advocate for Indigenous peoples across BC and Canada, as well as a cherished friend and ally of UBCIC. UBCIC remembers Ron for his indefatigable drive, his courageous soul, and his integrity and wisdom – all of which he channeled into his fight against the oppressive, colonial systems that sought to strip Indigenous peoples of their identities and cultures.

Born in Smithers, BC, and trained as a logger and a glazier, Ron became a trailblazing leader in the fight for the rights of off-reserve and non-Status Indigenous people. For Ron, this fight would begin in earnest in 1970, when he joined the Board of the BC Association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI). He would go on to become the founding Vice-President of its successor, the United Native Nations (UNN) from 1976 to 1978 and 1984, and its President from 1985 to 1991. In 1991, he was elected National President of the Native Council of Canada, a role he would serve until 1994 (prior to it being renamed the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples). This was a crucial period for Indigenous peoples across the country, as Ron would lead the team that would successfully negotiate Indigenous peoples' right to self-government in the Charlottetown Accord. From 1985 to 1991, Ron also served as President of the B.C. Native Housing Corporation as it grew to be one of the largest and most innovative Native-run housing agencies in the country.

In 1980, Grand Chief George Manuel, then President of UBCIC, approached Ron to unite in the fight against Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's patriation package. Without hesitation, Ron sprung to action, applying his strategic mind, tireless spirit, and natural skills as an orator to the cause. He would become instrumental in the constitutional fight – first with the Constitution Express' advance team in Ottawa, and then leading in the organization of the Constitution Express II through Europe

in 1981. Moving from province to province, the Constitution Express first garnered the attention and support of the wider Canadian public before precipitating an internationally regarded movement to prevent the new Constitution from extinguishing the recognition of Indigenous Title and Rights. On this momentous trip, Ron would make lifelong friends around the globe, ultimately returning to Europe with Indigenous veterans to honour their contributions to the First and Second World Wars and fighting for their recognition within Canada.

“It is with sorrow I mark Ron George’s passing, but it is with great joy, hope, and inspiration that I honour and remember his life. Ron has left an indelible, luminous mark upon this world – a legacy of strength, tenacity, and vision that will inspire future generations to come. His efforts to advance the Constitution Express and hold Canada accountable for its attempts to abolish Indigenous rights helped lay the integral groundwork for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination today,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC. “Above all, Ron George was an individual full of compassion and heart – as an off-reserve, Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chief, Ron believed in and fostered inclusivity, equity, and care for all. Collaborating with and across many diverse communities and sectors, Ron supported Indigenous women in the fight to end the sex-based discrimination of the *Indian Act* and helped develop Aboriginal-run community services in BC that were integral for securing housing, child welfare, youth employment, and justice for Indigenous peoples. Above all, we remember Ron George not just for his many incredible accomplishments, but for the endless love he had for his people and his family, and for the fierce love they hold for him in return.”

UBCIC mourns with all who knew and loved Ron, and we send our most heartfelt condolences to his family, Nation, community, and loved ones in Canada and around the world. Part of the legacy Ron leaves behind is his book, *The Fifth World*, which he was finishing at the time of his passing. Tracing the history of his family's dispossession and relocation across four generations, Ron’s story is one of unity and the collective – it is a story borne aloft the wider movement among off-reserve and non-Status peoples for the recognition of their land, institutions, and identity, and a story Indigenous peoples in BC and Canada can continue being inspired and galvanized by.

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*UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.*

For more information please visit [www.ubcic.bc.ca](http://www.ubcic.bc.ca)