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**OPEN LETTER: Call for Decriminalization of Poverty and Homelessness; demand for the repatriation of CRAB Park and surrounding lands to Indigenous stewards, the establishment of a healing centre, housing for all, and charges against the Namegans 48 to be dropped.**

We are writing as defenders of the sacred fire at Namegans Nation 2.0 (so-called "Lot D" next to CRAB Park) and other concerned groups and individuals, to voice our support of the CRAB Park Demands of repatriated land, a healing centre, and adequate housing for all, as well as to demand that the charges against the Namegans 48 be dropped. In making these demands we also bring attention to the cyclical and structural violence enacted by those with corporate and governmental power, and the disproportionate police enforcement against peaceful protestors and against Indigenous, impoverished and homeless people who are faced with continual displacement while seeking safety and shelter.

CRAB Park exists today because of the 60-tent occupation in 1984, led by Don Larson's initiative C.R.A.B. Water for Life Society, that lasted on those lands for 74 days in demand for a Downtown Eastside green space. This history, and Elder Veronica's involvement with the original 1984 occupation, contributed to the decision to rebuild the community that had been displaced from Oppenheimer Park on May 8th, 2020, on the parking lot next to CRAB Park. We remain in solidarity with Indigenous matriarchs, Elder Veronica and organizer Chrissy Brett, and stand by the CRAB Park Demands as outlined by Indigenous leaders and residents:

1. The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority return the land surrounding CRAB Park to the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations who are the stewards of the lands that the Port is occupying.
2. No evictions to CRAB Park tent city residents until the federal, provincial and municipal governments house all houseless and underhoused residents in the DTES in places we want to live in and begin construction of 10,000 units of permanent, adequate housing, renting at welfare pension rates and operated under the control of residents council, with cooking facilities, no guest restrictions, no ID requirements, and where people can safely use drugs.
3. The City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Park Board and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority must honour their commitment to, or establish a commitment to work with Indigenous organizations to establish a healing lodge at CRAB Park.

On June 16th, 2020, the residents of the reestablished tent city, Namegans Nation 2.0, were once again forcibly displaced, and 48 supporters arrested. This parking lot is on unceded Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), Xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), and Səlilil̓wətaʔɫ (Tsleil-Waututh) land, meaning any claims to ownership by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) are based on colonial theft.

Communications with the VFPA, following the colonial court-ordered injunction and prior to eviction, indicated the injunction would not be enforced until supports and resources for housing were in place, yet the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) showed up armed and unannounced at 6 am on June 16th. The Indigenous liaison officer who had been working with the camp for five weeks was “unavailable” on the day of eviction; the Indigenous liaison officer who was instead present on June 16th was not Indigenous and deescalation efforts that had been previously discussed were not implemented. Officers misled residents by stating housing alternatives would be provided at the exit of the lot; residents were instead handed a sheet of paper with four phone numbers of housing societies who were unprepared and unable to house or support the residents. The residents were ordered to leave by the Crown, the VFPA and the VPD with no alternatives provided, continuing the cycle of displacement exacerbated by a health pandemic.

Elder Veronica spoke with the liaison officer who agreed nobody would be arrested until all residents had left the property with all their belongings, and until the sacred fire burned out naturally, following Indigenous protocol. We, the majority of the arrested, stood in solidarity with Elder Veronica, and were ready to follow her lead and leave the site once these demands had been met. The VPD went against these agreements, and the Indigenous liaison officer poured water on the sacred fire, an act of cultural violence reflective of the police system’s stake in colonization. Supporters stayed on site with the sacred fire until they were arrested.

When the VPD began arresting supporters, police vehicles were positioned to block the view from legal observers and supporters. The majority of the officers did not wear personal protective equipment to protect against COVID-19; arrestees reported spittle landing on their faces due to the lack of masks worn, and were refused hand sanitizer at the processing station. Several arrestees were misgendered by officers despite being corrected repeatedly. Hand restraints were tied so tightly that medics at the processing station struggled to cut them off. One arrestee was informed by a doctor that they had nearly suffered nerve damage. Another was subjected to particularly aggressive handling, inappropriately invasive pat-downs, and racist comments. A supporter outside of the injunction area was brutally arrested; they were punched in the side of the head, knocked to the ground, had their glasses broken, and their ribs were bruised and displaced. The police gathered to form a wall, blocking all visibility from witnesses. It is important to bring light to this misconduct and brutality both in the greater context of conversations surrounding police actions, and in the local context of the misinformation and violence condoned when dealing with the unhoused community and their supporters.

The VPD receives fully one-third of the city budget, increasing by an average of \$10,000,000 per year. The VPD also receives millions of dollars in funding through the Vancouver Police Department Foundation from both independent and corporate sponsors. It is disturbing to witness corporations and colonial legal systems continue to uphold, protect, and invest in each other instead of community. Legal colonial and colonial legal systems are at the root of poverty and homelessness to begin with. Both the government and corporations have a history of using injunctions specifically to displace Indigenous people and communities who stand up for their land and cultural rights. The Crown, the VPD, and the VFPA should be

embarrassed to be spending money and time asserting supposed ownership over a parking lot, and more money and time to prosecute people for supporting the unhoused. That money could be better used. People are in dire need of housing, of resources and community. Namegans Nation 2.0 worked to provide that amidst two public health emergencies and a housing crisis. The injunction, the eviction, the arrests, and the ensuing legal action are a clear show of Canada's persisting legacy of displacing Indigenous and marginalized people. This cannot continue.

In the current climate of global and local crisis, it is especially imperative that we redirect resources toward community building. The CRAB Park Demands do this by prioritizing Indigenous land rights and practices, as well as ensuring housing is secured through consultation with those directly affected. The residents of the current Camp Kennedy-Trudeau are working together with 170 volunteers to maintain a safer community where resources are shared: food, laundry, healthcare, harm reduction supplies, a community library, de-escalation workshops, and so much more. Instead of continuing with the prosecution of the Namegans 48, we demand resources be redirected into fulfilling the CRAB Park Demands. We ask that you prioritize people over property, and community over corporate interest.

**Key signatories:**

Don Larson, Founder  
C.R.A.B. Water for Life Society

Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Eris Nyx, Project Coordinator  
Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War

Vancouver and Area Network of Drug Users

Vancouver Tenants' Union Steering Committee

Friends of CCAP

Our Homes Can't Wait Coalition

DTES Response

Aboriginal Mother Centre Society

Community Legal Assistance Society

Cody Hunt, Cultural Director and Culture Saves Lives

Katrina Pacey