



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 31, 2020

### **Tšilhqot'in Nation Declares State of Emergency in response to COVID-19**

**Williams Lake, BC** (March 31, 2020): The Tšilhqot'in National Government has declared a State of Emergency in response to the escalating threat of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on behalf of the six Tšilhqot'in communities: Tl'etinqox, Tl'esqox, Yunešit'in, Tšideldel, Xenigwet'in and ʔEsdilagh.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation declares this State of Emergency as an exercise of its inherent jurisdiction and authority to protect the health and safety of elders, citizens and communities as a paramount responsibility.

The State of Emergency is effective immediately and will remain in effect until further notice.

Please note that access to all Tšilhqot'in communities is closed to visitors as a precaution to protect elders and members, except for access by caregivers, medical and emergency personnel and essential services. Each community may have its own specific restrictions and exemptions that should be confirmed by visitors before accessing the community for any purpose.

To date, the Tšilhqot'in Nation has had no confirmed cases in any of the six communities. However, the Tšilhqot'in Nation supports the recommendations and orders by the government and the public health authorities to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation calls on its citizens and communities to protect elders and loved ones by staying home or safely on the land unless it is absolutely necessary or essential to leave home.

The State of Emergency declaration calls on the Federal and Provincial Governments, local governments, health authorities and all other involved parties to provide immediate, effective, coordinated, culturally appropriate and Indigenous-led support to the Tšilhqot'in Nation, Tšilhqot'in communities and all Indigenous peoples, consistent with the principles of self-determination.

The Tšilhqot'in Nation remains confident that its citizens and communities will persevere in this State of Emergency, and it is heartening to see Tšilhqot'in drawing on traditions, songs, language and medicine to keep the Nation strong during this outbreak.

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**Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chairman, T̓silhqot'in National Government:**

"We are taking the virus very seriously – many times in our history we have faced such threats. We know what our people need and how to support them. We face real challenges as Indigenous peoples because our communities are remote, our people live in overcrowded homes, many of our members are elderly or have respiratory issues or compromised immune systems – that is the legacy of colonization. That is why we are closing off access to our communities to all visitors except caregivers, medical and emergency personnel and essential services. Limiting visitors is the best way to protect our people from the virus. We are calling on government to increase emergency funding to our communities so we have the resources we need to address this threat – I can tell you right now, the \$305 million announced for Indigenous, Inuit and Metis people across Canada is not nearly enough.

At the same time, I know our people are resilient and strong. We will get through this. We will bunker down, stay home, stop any meetings or gatherings, make sure we maintain two-arms lengths distance from each other if we do need to go out. We have to do this to save the lives of our elders, of our loved ones. Or even better, camp out safely on our territory, I guarantee the land will look after you, you will be grounded and connected. This is a State of Emergency but it will make us stronger as T̓silhqot'in, it will connect us even more deeply with who we are, our connections to each other, and what we truly value in life.

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