



MEDIA RELEASE

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The T̓silhqot̓in Nation and the Yeqox Nilin Justice Society are proud to announce the soft opening of the new Indigenous Court in Williams Lake.

Williams Lake, BC: The T̓silhqot̓in Nation and Yeqox Nilin Justice Society are proud to announce the soft opening of the new Indigenous Court in Williams Lake. The Indigenous Court will be housed in Elks Hall.

The Indigenous Court provides sentencing for Indigenous individuals through a restorative and holistic system of justice. The Indigenous Court is grounded in cultural traditions and will focus on healing and balance for the accused through peacemaking and other traditional methods. Early last month, 10 Elders received training in preparation of sitting on the Court.

The Indigenous Court is a step towards implementing the recommendations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry (MMIWG) Report and the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP).

The Indigenous Court also addresses the wide-spread issue of systemic racism in the Canadian justice system. It is known that Indigenous people are over-represented in the justice system and the establishment of the Indigenous Court provides a justice system outside of the colonialist court system in Canada, one that is grounded in Indigenous traditional teachings and knowledge.

Quotes:

Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, TNG Tribal Chairman

“Today marks a significant step forward for our Nation. Our people have been and continue to be negatively impacted by the Canadian court system, and the long-standing racism that exists there. This has had severe consequences for our people, both young and old. This is an opportunity for us to showcase the strength of our culture and knowledge and really

make a difference in the lives of our people. This is just a first step and the next step will be creating a full Indigenous court system.”

Nits’il?in (Chief) Jimmy Lulua, TNG Vice-Chair

“Our primary focus is to build a healthy community. The formation of the Indigenous Court is essential for our peoples healing and for reconciliation. Our people have our own traditional laws and governance, which was dismantled under the colonialist system. We know how to best govern and take care of our people and this is taking back some of our power and putting our destinies back in our own hands.”

Nits’il?in (Chief) Otis Guichon, T?sideldel First Nation

“This is a powerful moment for our people. This was made possible by our Nation and neighbouring First Nations coming together to ensure that our people are being taken care of and getting the support that they need from the justice system. This is about community, and helping our people stay connected to each other and our Indigenous culture and heritage.”

Executive Director, Samantha-Jo Dick, Yeqox Nilin Justice Society

“Today we celebrate a win for the four Nations surrounding the Williams Lake area; the T?silhqot’in, Northern Secwepemc, Southern Dekelh, and the M?tis. We came together Nation-to-Nation to bring this process to Williams Lake, and because of these efforts and our dedication, the Indigenous Court is now a reality. The Indigenous Court opens the door to bringing our own traditional justice forms to the table. This process could not have happened without the support of the Nations, Elders, justice workers, and front-line workers. Today marks a step forward in recognizing our traditional forms of justice, it will show the strength we have as First Nations people to help one another through the teaching and guidance of our Elders.”

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