



## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 8, 2021

### **The T̂silhqot'in Nation calls for unity with its neighbours in the Cariboo-Chilcotin to get through the increasing COVID-19 cases in the area together: Incidents of Racism reported by T̂silhqot'in members**

**Williams Lake, BC:** The T̂silhqot'in Nation is calling for unity with its neighbours in the Cariboo-Chilcotin to get through the increasing COVID-19 cases in the area together. For several weeks the Cariboo-Chilcotin has seen increasing COVID-19 cases. While there have been numerous examples of the communities supporting each other through this challenging time, there have also been troubling reports of racism towards T̂silhqot'in members.

T̂silhqot'in members are reporting racism in their attempts to receive services in Williams Lake, and even being denied service, with the reasoning provided it was because they are from the T̂silhqot'in Nation. This is discrimination; residents of Williams Lake have not been denied service because of their geographical location despite increasing cases throughout the city.

The T̂silhqot'in Nation understands that additional restrictions and measures have been adopted by governments and businesses to ensure that COVID-19 does not spread to others, such as mask wearing requirements, checking temperatures and social distancing. The T̂silhqot'in Nation has also implemented numerous COVID-19 restrictions and measures in each of its communities to prevent the spread. However, there is no justification for denying service to those who live on the reserve or on the basis of geographical location.

Moreover, there have been many opinions and comments shared through online public forums and on social media about Indigenous peoples being responsible for bringing COVID-19 to the area and spreading it to others. The COVID-19 disease is not isolated to Indigenous peoples. COVID-19 is a disease that impacts everyone and we will have to work together to overcome it.

The T̂silhqot'in Nation is calling for unity and for each of us to work together to protect our families, elders and communities. Rather than pointing blame, which only causes division and makes a challenging time that much more challenging, let's work together to stop the spread and defeat the COVID-19 virus.

#### **Quotes:**

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

*"We thank our members for stepping up to support one another and we recognize businesses such as Telus who generously donated groceries to our communities during our community lockdowns so that our members could stay home. It's important to recognize that there has been some good will and positive gestures during this difficult time. It's outrageous and unacceptable that our people are experiencing racism as a result of a global pandemic. The virus is all around us, found across the entire*

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*world and country, and yet our people are being blamed for its arrival in the area and its spread. That is not logical, it's just racist. The virus is challenging enough without having to contend with racism on top of it all. We want to share our experience and message because we hope that people will stop pointing blame at one another, stop creating false enemies and remember that our real fight is against COVID-19 and we must work together to defeat it."*

**Nits'il?in (Chief) Willie Sellars, Williams Lake First Nation**

*"2020 and the early part of the 2021 has been challenging for the people of our region, our province, our country -- and indeed for people all around the world. COVID-19 has made an inexorable spread around the globe, and in the early part of 2021 it arrived amongst our WLFN Membership. With a strong emergency response, and with the support of our many regional, provincial and national partners, we have been very successful in containing the spread of COVID-19 at WLFN. Anyone who would attribute responsibility for COVID-19 transmission to First Nations people or First Nations communities is acting irrationally and making incorrect assessments based on race. That constitutes racism and is entirely unacceptable. It's critical that we continue to be kind and respectful to one another, and that we work together collaboratively to defeat this virus. Our strength as a community comes through unity."*

**Adrian Dix, B.C. Minister of Health**

*"The COVID-19 virus doesn't discriminate, but unfortunately people and systems can. Systemic racism exists, and is damaging to the health and wellness of all people in our province. COVID-19 screening and safety plans that exclude individuals based on race or geographic location are discriminatory and have no place in our collective efforts to work in partnership with Indigenous leaders and communities to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, First Nations have been working in close coordination with Interior Health Authority and First Nation Health Authority to support our province's COVID-19 response and we ask all members of the Cariboo-Chilcotin community to join us in this effort."*

**Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer**

*"There is no place for racism or discrimination in our province. We are all experiencing immense challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and this is especially the case for Indigenous communities, who also carry the burdens of colonization. We must all take appropriate public health actions to prevent the spread of the virus, and similarly, be proactive in anti-racist actions to prevent any form of racism or systemic discrimination."*

**Margo Wagner, Chair of the Cariboo Regional District**

*"Racism is unacceptable at any time, but especially when all the people who live in the Cariboo need to stay strong together. Everyone is doing what they can to stop the spread of the virus. Now we must double down on our efforts to stop racism from infecting our community. We can emerge from this pandemic with stronger ties between communities across the region and a renewed spirit of unity and respect. But only if we treat each other with kindness and care at a personal level."*

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