



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 4, 2022

Tsilhqot'in Nation celebrates Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse being awarded the Order of British Columbia.

Victoria, BC: On March 4, 2022, the Tsilhqot'in Nation (which is made up of the six communities of Tl'etinqox, ʔEsdilagh, Yunešit'in, Tšideldel, Tl'esqox and Xeni Gwet'in) and the BC Government celebrated Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chair for the Tsilhqot'in National Government, being awarded the Order of British Columbia.

The Order of British Columbia is the highest honour that British Columbia can bestow upon a citizen and Nits'il?in Alphonse is a worthy and deserving recipient. Nits'il?in Alphonse would be the first to credit the ground-breaking victories of the Tsilhqot'in Nation to the ancestors that fought to protect the land and culture, to former and current Chiefs and leaders, and to the Elders that testified at trial. At the same time, there can be no question that Nits'il?in Alphonse, as Tribal Chair for the Nation, was instrumental in the Tsilhqot'in People achieving recognized Aboriginal Rights and Title over Tsilhqot'in lands in June 2014 and standing up to protect sacred lands and waters in the face of two proposals for massive open pit mines. Nits'il?in Alphonse continues to advocate passionately for Indigenous Title for First Nations across the country and abroad.

Nits'il?in Alphonse, and the other Tsilhqot'in Chiefs, have strongly led the Tsilhqot'in Nation over the past several years. This included securing a historic tripartite *Gwets'en Nilt'i* Pathway Agreement ("Towards it, We are Striving") with the federal and provincial governments in August 2019. The first-of-its-kind Agreement is a step towards true reconciliation and is exemplary of the ethics of the United Nation's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The purpose of the agreement is to support the Tsilhqot'in in their rights to self-determination and shape a path for the Nation to exercise Aboriginal Title over its traditional territory.

Nits'il?in Alphonse is an inspiration to not only the Tsilhqot'in People, but also to many Indigenous Peoples in Canada and around the world. His achievements are significant and many and the Tsilhqot'in Nations stands proud to see Nits'il?in Alphonse recognized and honoured for his considerable contributions to the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Tsilhqot'in People.

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Quotes:

Nits'il?in (Chief) Otis Guichon, Vice Chair, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government

"I know I speak for many when I say that we are very proud to have Chief Alphonse as the leader and Tribal Chair of the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government and as Chief for his community of Tl'etinqox. Over the years, I have worked along side him and witnessed his passion for the Nation and our people. He is a true warrior. There are so many examples of him championing our Nation that I cannot speak to them all, but they include everything from Aboriginal Rights and Title, honouring and preserving the legacy of our T̓silhqot̓'in War Chiefs and defending our lands, waters and resources such as was the case with Teztan Biny (Fish Lake). I would encourage people to look up these historic achievements and learn more about them. That is how you can really come to understand why Chief Alphonse is a deserving person to be awarded this honour."

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC – Lieutenant Governor

"As Chancellor of the Order of British Columbia, it is an immense honour to recognize the significant achievements of Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse," said the Honourable Janet Austin, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. "His steadfast leadership and advancement of the rights of First Nations in BC have made him a pillar amongst the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation, and throughout the province. He is an inspiration for Indigenous people, and for all who seek a better future for their communities. I am very pleased to welcome Chief Alphonse to the Order of British Columbia."

The Honourable John Horgan, Office of the Premier & The Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

"Chief Joe Alphonse's tireless advocacy for Indigenous self-determination is well known across British Columbia. Chief Alphonse is a respected leader who was influential in achieving the first declaration of Aboriginal title in Canada for the T̓silhqot̓'in people. He is a man versed in language and history who has strong and unwavering vision for the future of the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation, and has helped place British Columbia on the path to reconciliation and partnership with Indigenous communities. The achievements he has led for the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation, alongside the influence he has across the province and country, are truly admirable. My heartfelt congratulations to a great guy on this well-deserved recognition."

National Chief RoseAnne Archibald, Assembly of First Nations

"Congratulations Chief Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chairman of the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government and elected Chief of the Tl'etinqox-t'in Government, on receiving the Order of British Columbia. This is a well-deserved recognition of Chief Alphonse's extraordinary and longstanding leadership. He has dedicated his life and energy to building a healthy and strong T̓silhqot̓'in Nation. The ripple effects will be felt for all Nations in BC and across Turtle Island, for generations to come."

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Greg D'Avignon, President & CEO of the Business Council of BC

“Through his stoic resolve and leadership, Chief Joe has fought tirelessly for Aboriginal Rights and Title. His efforts have served as a catalyst to advance meaningful reconciliation, economic opportunity and social equity, not only for the Tsilhqot'in Nation, but for all Indigenous people across Canada, today and into the future,” said Greg D'Avignon, President and CEO, Business Council of B.C. “I have deep appreciation as a friend and colleague for the contribution he has made to British Columbia.”

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Quick Facts:

- Tsilhqot'in Nation is comprised of six communities, ʔEsdilagh, Tl'esqox, Tl'etingox, Tšideldel, Xeni Gwet'in, Yunešit'in. Together, they make up over 3,000 citizens (Statistics Canada, 2016).
- In 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a unanimous decision, confirmed that the Tsilhqot'in Peoples had Aboriginal Title to 1900 square kilometres of their traditional territory.
- During the Chilcotin War of 1864 and 1865, six Tsilhqot'in War Chiefs were tried and hanged while negotiating peace talks with the colonial government. In 2014 the provincial government exonerated the six War Chiefs of any wrongdoing. In 2018, the federal government followed with an exoneration delivered both in the House of Commons and again while visiting the Declared Title Area.
- The Tsilhqot'in Nation and Canada signed the *Gwets'en Nilt'i* Pathway Letter in 2018, while Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was visiting the Declared Title Area. The Pathway letter set in motion the shared vision and a path towards reconciliation and next steps.
- In August of 2019, the tripartite *Gwets'en Nilt'i* Pathway Agreement (“Towards it, We are Striving”) was signed both the federal and provincial governments.

Learn more:

Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia – Tsilhqot'in Title Decision:

<https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do>

Announcement of *Gwets'en Nilt'i* Pathway Agreement:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019IRR0048-001670>

Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement:

[2019 08 Agreement gwetsen nilti pathway agreement signed.pdf \(tsilhqotin.ca\)](#)

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