



July 28, 2022

## In the Face of Continued Colonial Practices, Syilx Okanagan Nation Sign the axá i? sccuntət i? tl ǰa?xítət ǰl i? nəqsíltət (Family Declaration) at Annual General Assembly to Protect Children and Families

**snkǰykntn (Revelstoke), Syilx Territory:** From July 26 – 28, 2022, the Okanagan Nation Alliance hosted our Annual General Assembly in snkǰykntn. This annual event gathered Syilx Okanagan members from across the Nation — including leaders, Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, youth and community members — to celebrate the many successes that have taken place for Syilx people over the last year and reflect on the persistent challenges that we collectively face together.

This gathering witnessed the historic signing of the axá i? sccuntət i? tl ǰa?xítət ǰl i? nəqsíltət (Family Declaration). Over the last two years Language Speakers and Elders throughout the Nation have worked diligently over the years to develop a Declaration that upholds our Syilx laws and affirms our rights and responsibilities to have the ability to protect the health and well-being our children and families. This document is deeply rooted in Syilx captik<sup>wl</sup>, language, and worldview, while providing a clear path for moving forward to self-determination. The signing of the Declaration was given further weight and importance considering the visit of the Pope to Turtle Island, yet again bringing to light the trauma of colonization, and the damages that such institutions continue to inflict on our people, and subsequently our family systems.

ki law na (ǰílmix<sup>wm</sup> Clarence Louie), ONA Tribal Chair, stated that: “Injustices against our children and our families continue to be perpetrated on territory. We are calling on the Province and the Government of Canada to adhere to this Declaration and recognize our inherent rights and responsibilities to take care of our children and families on our own terms and in our own way.”

Carol Holmes, Syilx Elder, shared that: “We need to be responsible for one another. Before contact our families were self-sustaining and interdependent, we cared for our children. Our children were the center, our elders were the center, and so the Declaration that we have embraces those values and those beliefs. We’re no longer going to accept what happened to us, instead what we’re going to do is make sure that our children, our great grandchildren, and our children yet are going to be the strong, fearless, courageous, knowledgeable people that they were meant to be.”

ǰílmix<sup>wm</sup> Greg Gabriel, Penticton Indian Band, also reiterated that: “The Declaration speaks to our teachings, our captik<sup>wl</sup>, as to who we are, Syilx Nation people. The guiding principles built into the Declaration will provide us guidance and be used by future generations on how we use our traditional values, our teachings and how we look after our families for the many years yet to

come. This expression of Syilx law in relation to our families cannot be ignored; we are exercising our inherent jurisdiction over Syilx children and families. The governments of Canada and British Columbia are now put on Notice and must step aside as we carry out our sacred responsibilities to our future Syilx Okanagan generations.

Eliza Terbasket, long standing Syilx Okanagan Nation Wellness Committee member shared that I believe this declaration embeds the future actions that will move our nation forward and ensuring our children are safe and cared for. The Declaration is vital piece of our Nation building raising our children to be always proud of who they are and striving in their language and culture.”

In addition to this years Annual Assembly the people spoke to the importance of hosting this years gathering in the north-eastern part of Syilx territory. The Syilx Okanagan Nation’s connection to the territory has been profoundly affected by the Columbia River Treaty (CRT). The dams industrialized the Columbia River system, destroyed thousands of square kilometers of land, permanently disrupted natural ecosystems, and threatened many species that call this territory home. The flooding destroyed historical Syilx Okanagan villages, sacred sites, burial grounds, and food harvesting areas, breaking many of the cultural and familial connections our communities held with the Upper Columbia and n̓x̓ wntkwitkw (Columbia River). By journeying out and having our Elders and Youth being on the land together to share in our Syilx history, stories, language, and perspectives, we are working to ensure that these connections continue to be handed down for generations to come. Alongside pertinent presentations and dialogues, there was also a variety of cultural activities taking place, including on-the-land tours to Syilx ancestral villages and places of cultural significance.

The Assembly ended today July 28 2022 and it was good to see our people gathering post-COVID-19.

~

*The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) was formed in 1981 as the inaugural First Nations government in the Okanagan, which represents the 8 member communities of the Okanagan Nation. The ONA mandate is to work collectively to advance and assert Syilx Okanagan Nation Title and Rights over the Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory.*

**For further information please contact:**

ki law na (ýilmixʷm Clarence Louie), ONA Tribal Chair

Tel: 250-498-9132