



Syilx Okanagan Nation Calls for Justice Reform

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(Syilx Territory: Westbank, BC) - Community members from the Syilx Okanagan Nation gathered at the Penticton Courthouse on Monday February 26, 2018 to rally against the systemic injustices exposed by the deaths of Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine.

The deaths highlight how Canada's legal system continues to fail Indigenous people. Earlier this month, an all-white jury acquitted a white Saskatchewan farmer of Colten Boushie's murder. Colten Boushie was from the Red Pheasant Cree Nation. Almost two weeks later, a jury acquitted a Winnipeg man accused of killing 15-year old Tina Fontaine, a member of the Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba.

"We are here to stand with the families and communities who are hurting from continued brutality and injustice", said the rally's organizers. "More must be done to protect our brothers and sisters who continue to suffer from injustice and indignity."

In response to Colten Boushie's death, the federal government has promised to reform how juries are selected in Canada. The Syilx Okanagan Chiefs are calling on the Trudeau government to take the steps necessary to ensure that Indigenous people can have faith in the criminal justice system and to partner with First Nations in this important work.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Chair of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, attended the rally to stand in solidarity with the Boushie and Fontaine families. He noted that criminal justice reform must be part of the Government of Canada's recently announced Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework ("Framework"). Grand Chief Stewart Phillip stated that, "True justice must not be delayed any further but felt by all our communities now if we are to advance our relationship, an opportunity we have always demanded, and the Prime Minister and his government now envision. There cannot be true reconciliation until our people are safe."

Since the 1910 *Sir Wilfred Laurier Memorial*, the Syilx Okanagan Nation has been advocating for the recognition and implementation of Syilx Title and Rights. The Prime Minister's announcement on the Framework was long overdue. Although the Syilx Okanagan Chiefs are concerned about the unrealistic timeline that has been set for developing the Framework, it is critical that First Nations be full partners in designing the Framework to ensure full implementation of Indigenous rights.

Chief Chad Eneas, Chair of the *Syilx* Okanagan Nation Natural Resources Council, noted that, “We have always governed ourselves. This is an opportunity for the federal government to finally recognize and support that fact.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, concluded by stating that, “Words alone are not enough. Concrete outcomes need to be realized. Although it is premature to speculate on whether the Framework will be a historic breakthrough, the *Syilx* Okanagan Nation is ready to engage on the Framework at the highest level in order to ensure our Title and Rights are rightfully upheld and fully realized. With the 2018 federal budget announcement recently made, we expect that the long-term and overdue resources are properly allocated to support the activities and innovation necessary to build healthier and stronger communities resulting in safer environments for our children and families.”

The *Syilx* Okanagan Nation represents its member communities and is mandated to protect, advance and defend its collective Title and Rights. The Nation’s member communities include: Okanagan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Westbank First Nation, Penticton Indian Band, Upper Similkameen Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, and Osoyoos Indian Band.

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