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June 7, 2021

(amiskwacîwâskahikan, Wocodaki) The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Grand Chief Okimaw Vernon Watchmaker extended an invite to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and requested that the Special Rapporteur receive institutional support from the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. All of this occurring at the same time that the United Nations Experts called on Canada to investigate the mass grave at the residential school located in Kamloops, BC.

In a precedent setting statement that was issued by various independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, the experts urged Canadian authorities to “...conduct a full-fledged investigation into the circumstances and responsibilities of these deaths...and to proceed to the identification and registration of the missing children...and take similar investigations in all other Indigenous residential schools in the country.” Grand Chief Watchmaker agreed with those statements and emphasizes that “the scale and gravity of the mass graves that were found in Kamloops has the world watching. The Prime Ministers actions in response to this are being viewed on the world stage. These matters cannot be ignored and disregarded any longer. The UN experts also urged the Catholic Church to provide full access of the information to the authorities to conduct investigations, and to publicly disclose the results”

The Grand Chief had officially requested that Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs provide a visa for the visit and that the Prime Minister immediately suspend all parliamentary and legislative activities surrounding Bill C-15 in order to provide the time and space necessary to focus on the issues surrounding the harsh discovery of the mass grave at the former residential school. “Bill C-15 is directly related to these types of matters. Bill C-15 was touted as legislation that would implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; however, Canada only mentioned the Declaration, rather than make it law” stated the Grand Chief. “Canada has made every attempt to domesticate the Declaration rather than seek to make Canada’s laws come in line with it. This is a backward attempt to try and convince people that things are being done,” said Grand Chief Watchmaker. “In our view, the graves of the 215 children and the grieving country should take precedence. A shift in focus from pushing flawed legislation to providing tangible results to the community of Tk’emlups et Secwepemc First Nation needs to occur and is essential at this time.”

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