



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **CHIEFS CALL FOR PROTECTION OF THE MEDICINE CHEST**

**[October 27, 2021]**

At a recent gathering at Enoch Cree Nation, Okimaw Lewis of Onion Lake Cree Nation reminded fellow Treaty Six Chiefs that “in the last Parliament, Minister Marc Miller announced his intention to pass legislation that directly impacts our Treaty rights by replacing the Medicine Chest.” Okimaw Lewis, along with fellow Chiefs (Chief David Sandfly, Big Island Lake Cree Nation; Chief Jack Rayne, Big River First Nation; Okimaw Wally Burns, James Smith Cree Nation; Chief Wayne Semaganis, Little Pine First Nation; Chief Duane Antoine, Poundmaker Cree Nation; Chief Lori Whitecalf, Sweetgrass First Nation; Chief James Snakeskin, Thunderchild First Nation; Chief Blaine Fiddler, Waterhen Lake First Nation; Chief Greg Desjarlais, Frog Lake First Nations; Chief Randy Ermineskin, Ermineskin Cree Nation; Chief Irvin Bull, Louis Bull Tribe; Chief Roger Marten, Cold Lake First Nations; Chief Stan Houle, Whitefish Lake First Nation #128; Chief Trevor John, Kehewin Cree Nation; Chief Vern Saddleback, Samson Cree Nation; Chief Leonard Standing on the Road, Montana First Nation; Chief Doug Beaverbones, O’Chiese First Nation) of Treaty 6 Nations, are now voicing their grave concern about Canada’s agenda to legislate on the Treaty right to health, and warning organizations claiming to represent Treaty Nations.

The Chiefs’ concerns were confirmed when they learned that the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Executive refused a request from the Chiefs of the Treaty 6 Confederacy in July to stop all discussions and activities related to the proposed health legislation. Instead, the following month the AFN Executive unilaterally passed a resolution, no. 09/2021, supporting the government’s agenda. “The Confederacy Chiefs reminded the AFN that they are a not a Treaty Nation. As a corporate organization, they have no authority or jurisdiction to make decisions that impact Treaty.”

AFN’s own resolution shows how the organization is enthusiastically going down a path that puts in jeopardy the Medicine Chest in Treaty Six. Chief Wally Burns has consistently stated “When our ancestors put into the Treaty, the Medicine Chest clause, they wanted our peoples to have access to health care – and not a version unilaterally determined by Canada.” Chief Burns has been actively involved in trying to get a supply of vaccines for Treaty Nations in Saskatchewan, which Canada has tried to block.

Treaty 6 Chiefs reject Resolution 09/2021. “It is bad enough that Canada acts without engagement of our Nations, but to have a National Indigenous organization which did not make Treaty go against the position of Treaty Chiefs on such a critical issue, and goes against their mandate” said Chief Randy Ermineskin of Ermineskin Cree Nation.

“The reason we wanted the AFN to table resolutions until December was to allow for a proper debate on this important issue amongst the Chiefs. Now we find out that the executive of AFN, without any authority, has supposedly approved a resolution with far reaching implications in our Treaty Nations” added Chief Irvin Bull of Louis Bull Tribe. Treaty Chiefs in Alberta have consequently passed a resolution directed at the federal government to stop all work on the development of federal legislation until a bilateral process respecting the Treaty right to health is put in place” added Confederacy of Treaty Six Grand Chief Greg Desjarlais of Frog Lake First Nations.

Treaty Six contains two clauses directly related to health: the medicine chest; and the famine and pestilence clause. In the time of a famine and pestilence, the Crown was to assist our Nations. In the time of this most recent pandemic, we witnessed yet another complete failure of the government to deal with Treaty Peoples. The federal government’s response to assist us during the pandemic did not take into consideration: lack of housing, overcrowding in homes, poor water quality, no transportation and many other criteria that would have made our Peoples’ lives more bearable during a pandemic. AFN needs to stop and step back from its current path and take direction from the Chiefs and Nations it claims to represent.

We are calling on the federal government to stop legislating “for” us and start living in the spirit of Treaty “with” us. We remember our Treaty, and we call on the government to remember and honour its existing obligations owed to Treaty Peoples, rather than trying to replace our Treaty with whatever policies are favoured by the government of the day.



If you would like more information about this, please contact:  
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