

Statement for Immediate Release
June 4, 2018

STATEMENT FROM THE BC ABORIGINAL JUSTICE COUNCIL FOLLOWING CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST INDIGENOUS JUSTICE SUMMIT IN BC

Musqueam Traditional Territory/Vancouver, BC – On June 2, 2018, the 10th BC Justice Summit concluded on Musqueam traditional territory. Mandated through legislation, the annual BC Justice Summit process was created in 2013 to provide an opportunity for forthright discussion on justice topics between justice and public safety sector leaders in BC. The May 31-June 2 Summit was the first of two Summits in 2018 and is notably the first time that the Summits have focused on Indigenous peoples and the justice system in BC.

During the three-day Justice Summit, over 80 Indigenous justice leaders and experts, along with approximately 40 BC justice and public safety leaders, including the BC Attorney General and Solicitor General, came together to learn from one another, to share experiences and to talk together about priority pathways to transform the existing justice system in BC, acknowledging the ways that it has and continues to fail Indigenous people.

“The justice system in BC has failed and continues to fail First Nations in BC. First Nations people are incarcerated at far higher rates than non-First Nations people in both Canada and BC and are more likely to be victims of violent crime,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN). “This combined with the overwhelming number of First Nations children-in-care causes incalculable damage to our families, and communities, further contributing to the intergenerational trauma and systemic racism experienced by our people in the justice system.” The Regional Chief concluded, “We must work together to develop a BC Indigenous Justice Strategy and Action Plan in BC. The experiences of our people reinforce the need for us to be leading this strategy, and I am encouraged that our discussions over the past three days will lead to the actions necessary to create transformative changes.”

Since 2017, the BC Aboriginal Justice Council (BCAJC) has been a partner, working with BC, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), the Métis Nation of BC (MNBC) and others to help ensure that the 2018 Justice Summits meaningfully involve Indigenous peoples in discussions around the future of the justice system in BC and the transformative changes that are required.

Summit participants expressed that they were encouraged by the discussions and are committed to continue the difficult but important work ahead.

“The dialogue and discussion at the Summit was positive,” said BCAJC Co-Chair Nancy Sandy. She continued, “we need to continue the difficult work of reconciliation together when we leave the

Summit, and specifically, we need to continue to look for a path to Indigenous jurisdiction where Indigenous laws guide us in the work of rebuilding a justice system that works for our people.”

Lissa Smith, Provincial Vice-President and Minister of Justice for Métis Nation of BC (MNBC) stated “Leadership from the Métis Nation of BC were present and engaged at the Justice Summit. We are hopeful that this Summit will prove a turning point in our relationships, and we are committed to remaining involved in the critical work to build jointly with the Province and our other Indigenous partners a BC Indigenous Justice Strategy.” She concluded, “We were pleased to see the Métis Nation of BC and our Métis Nation Accord 2 that was signed by the Province of BC in 2016, of which Justice, Children and Families and 2 of the 10 priorities acknowledged at the Summit proceedings.”

Doug White, Co-Chair for the BCAJC stated, “We are in a critical moment. We need to interrogate the very foundations of our justice system in BC and in Canada. It is our duty and obligation as leaders to work to find solutions and pathways forward through uncertainty. The Summit created a space where we came together to help reset our relationship.” He concluded, “No one in the room left with the illusion that this work will be easy, but there is a hope that we can do something together that has never been done before to interrupt the inertia of a justice system that is wreaking havoc on our peoples.”

The second 2018 Justice Summit is planned for November 2018 and will be an opportunity to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous justice leaders and experts together again to further refine ideas and put forward recommendations for change to the BC justice system. The BCAJC will continue to advocate for an additional Indigenous Justice Forum for Indigenous leaders and experts to come together before the November Justice Summit to continue the work to jointly develop, with the Province, an action-oriented Indigenous Justice Strategy.

For further information, please contact:

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The BC Aboriginal Justice Council is a council with one member appointed by each of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC. Three additional council members are jointly appointed by these organizations based on their expertise in Aboriginal Justice. For more information on the BCAJC please visit bcajc.ca