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RE: The Okanagan Nation Alliance Chiefs' Executive Council expresses its full support for its member community, Lower Similkameen Indian Band in the seeking protection and preservation of ancestral remains found at Cawston, BC.

SYILX OKANAGAN TERRITORY (Cawston, BC) The Okanagan Nation Alliance ("ONA") Chiefs' Executive Council is taking direct action on this matter due to the long-standing lack of meaningful dialogue and lack of solutions that would result in proper dealing with these ancestral remains.

Today, Elders, Chiefs, Former-Chiefs, and community members of the Okanagan Nation Alliance held an emergency meeting at the Lower Similkameen Indian Band ("LSIB") to address the issue of ancestral remains found at Cawston, BC. At the heart of this issue is the disturbance and desecration of ancestral remains on a property in Cawston on February 29, 2016. Under the direction and guidance of the LSIB, the Chiefs' Executive Council of the Syilx Okanagan Nation is prepared to take any and all political, legal and direct action measures to protect and preserve these Syilx ancestral remains.

While the LSIB Chief and Council have worked diligently in finding a satisfactory solution to all of the parties involved, the dialogue currently remains at a stand-still due to a lack of action from the Province. Continuously, the discovery of ancestral remains and the disturbance of sites of significant cultural heritage has often strained the relationship between the Province, First Nations and third party owners. The LSIB has developed a comprehensive approach to address the proper and respectful protection and preservation of these remains, yet the Province remains stanch in its position that it does not have any role or responsibilities in the resolution of this issue; this is wrong and disrespectful.

During the past six months, the LSIB has worked steadfastly on developing a reasonable approach that would result in the protection and preserve of these remains. While the provincial government has recognized the importance of conducting "a dialogue about resource use and economic development in this region that cannot proceed without the meaningful engagement of the members of the Syilx Nation", it has become readily apparent to both the LSIB and the ONA Chiefs' Executive Council that the provincial government is not committed to meaningful discussions that would result in the resolution of this matter.

Chief Keith Crow of the Lower Similkameen Indian Band has said, "Enough is enough. Enough dithering. We have waited long enough and we demand immediate action from the Province."

Meanwhile, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, both Chair of the Okanagan Nation Alliance and also the President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs has stated, "Clearly, as leaders, we carry a sacred duty to protect, preserve and defend our ancestral remains". He further went on to state, "therefore, we cannot continue to tolerate the on-going "stonewalling" on part of the Province of BC."

For further information, please contact:

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