

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

April 29, 2020



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Governments must respect First Nations Jurisdiction

(xw̓məθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), s̓kw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̓l̓ ilwətaʔt̓/se̓l̓ ílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC): The First Nations Leadership Council is urging all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, to recognize and respect First Nations jurisdiction and decisions as they take actions to protect their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical for all levels of governments to include and work collaboratively with neighbouring First Nations in our collective efforts in the fight against COVID-19.

First Nations populations are particularly vulnerable and could be more at risk due to their health, social and economic circumstances. The impact of a COVID-19 outbreak is of high concern for First Nations communities, especially remote or isolated communities that have very limited access to health services, hospital beds and ventilators. A COVID-19 outbreak could be devastating for these communities, especially for the elder population who are the knowledge and language keepers of our communities.

Many First Nations have heeded the advice of BC Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry in order to limit opportunities for the disease to spread and are taking proactive steps to ban all non-essential travel within their territories. Several such examples include Haida Gwaii, Okanagan Nation and Tahltan Nation. First Nations not only have a right to take these steps, they have a responsibility to utilize their jurisdictional authority to take pre-emptive measures to protect their communities from this devastating disease.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

For further comment please contact:

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