

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

February 8, 2022

### First Nations Leadership Council Strongly Condemns “Freedom Convoy” Movement Across Canada and its Spread of Misinformation, Racism, and Violence

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The so-called “Freedom Convoy” is legitimizing false opinions and misinformation regarding COVID-19 that put the health of all Canadians in danger and is rapidly fueling hatred and anger. The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is calling on leaders and citizens to stop supporting those dangerous messages and take action.

First Nations have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to the lack of adequate medical attention and resources, well-deserved distrust of the medical establishment, and the spread of misinformation. It’s clear from Omicron statistics that vaccinations are essential to keeping our health care system from imploding, with unvaccinated people 12 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 40 times more likely to die from the COVID-19 virus than vaccinated individuals. In addition to dangerous public health and safety misinformation, the convoy is also amplifying hate speech and dangerous racist sentiments. In Ottawa, not only were racist flags flown, racist signs paraded around, monuments desecrated, and a homeless shelter threatened, thousands of people and hundreds of vehicles occupied downtown Ottawa – the traditional territory of the Algonquin Peoples. The Algonquin Nation has [called](#) the actions occurring in their territory “unacceptable,” stating they did not support the set-up of a teepee, the pipe ceremony and sacred fire in Confederation Park. The appropriation of Indigenous culture to serve a divisive, misinformed agenda is horrific and indicative of the hateful, racist nature of the protests occurring across Canada, on the traditional, unceded territories of First Nations.

“These protests are fueling misinformation about public health mandates and the importance of vaccination. This misinformation has led to vaccine hesitancy, and many deaths,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. “Public health mandates utilize inconvenience to spur higher vaccination rates, but, being inconvenienced is not the same as having your Charter Rights violated. We commend the 90% of truckers who are vaccinated, especially given that their jobs put them in contact with many people.”

“As evidenced by the destructive, anarchic displays of anti-vax sentiments, as well as the state of emergency recently declared by Ottawa, the so-called ‘Freedom Convoy’ has sown division, intolerance, and misinformation during a time in which we cannot afford to have vaccine mandates and public health and safety endangered,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Showing great contempt and disregard for frontline healthcare workers, the convoy that hit Vancouver last Saturday was set to target three major hospitals and sparked clashes between the convoy and counter-protesters. There continues to be an explosive and shameful display of unlawful violence associated with the ‘Freedom Convoy’ and truly abhorrent racist conduct including blatant antisemitism. Furthermore, the police response to the protest-turned-occupation in Ottawa has, up until recently, been almost non-existent and appalling in their unwillingness to intercede. The racist double-standard in policing in this country is on full display -- had these protesters been Indigenous, the police would have cleared them out in a heartbeat.”



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“We are incredibly disturbed by the so-called protest that has been falsely labeled a “freedom” convoy. Based on what we’ve observed over the past week, it has become more and more evident that this is nothing more than an occupation of hate and racism. The attacks on Canada’s healthcare workers, the mocking of sacred Indigenous cultural practices and the blatant disregard for the citizens of Ottawa are all clear evidence of the true colours of the extremists who have taken over Canada’s capital,” said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit political executive. “The path out of this awful pandemic is to continue to allow medical science to dictate health mandates and protocols, not caving in to misguided protests born out of frustration, hate and racism. Canadians must band together to support and protect health care workers and first responders who have consistently stepped up and exposed themselves to higher risks on a daily basis to protect Canadians.”

The First Nations Leadership Council calls for a stronger response to the escalating and gross displays of aggression that comprise the convoy and calls on Canada to treat and prosecute racist attacks and hate speech as the crimes they are. We also call on the federal government to reinstate supports for those people who are still suffering economically due to COVID-19, and to keep in place the much-needed public health mandates.

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

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