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PRESS RELEASE

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New legal framework looks like attempt to turn First Nations into Municipalities

TORONTO, ONT – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Grand Chief Sheila North is unimpressed with today's announcement by Prime Minister Trudeau and reminds Canadians that it has been two years since the Prime Minister promised action on the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls-to-Action.

"Given the promises the Liberals have already made, the Prime Minister should be embarrassed that the real pain the Boushie and Baptist families are experiencing happened on his watch. Canada's laws are failing Indigenous societies in so many ways," Grand Chief Sheila North said. "And here again, more good words, but no action plan. Asking First Nations to commit to working with Canada is not an action plan. Decision making is key, commitment is key and that word "partnership", it must be a real partnership. The 10 principles announced earlier provided no detailed way forward for Canada. This meant the bureaucrats could not truly implement those principles. This is foreshadowed in Bill C-69 and the absence of free, prior and informed consent."

The MKO would like to see an approach based on the true spirit and intent of the treaty relationship. First Nations' laws must be recognized by Canada's legal system. It should also be recognized the process announced may not satisfy those who supported the Charlottetown Accord. There are some First Nations that want all options on the table, including the opening of the Canadian constitution to create a third level of government and distinct society status. We are also concerned the engagement sessions will be expensive and time consuming.

"Recognition is not the basis of rights. Observing and implementing is the language of treaty rights. Canada's laws have made the mess that we see today. It is safe to say our people already have Indigenous laws that need to be recognized and implemented. We should be meeting to truly start the work of implementation of treaty rights," Grand Chief North said. "There are Indigenous nations requiring real change to the inherent rights policy and the fiscal policy for implementation of self-government. Both make the promise of self-government very unappealing. Our rights are not contingent on government agreement. We will not have the treaties domesticated using the language of reconciliation and self-determination. This looks like a plan for municipalization, a plan to bring us into Confederation. We deserve self-determination under international law. It cannot be developed and legislated by Canada's legal framework. We are disappointed that Colten Boushie's family was used to bring attention to this announcement."

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~Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 30 First Nation communities in Manitoba's North since 1981~