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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RE: Dene Nation Condemns Forceful Invasion of Dene Cultural Camp

September 19th, 2022, Northwest Territories, Canada - The Dene Nation stands in solidarity with Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation in demanding an apology and investigation from the Northwest Territories government after a forceful invasion of a cultural camp Tuesday, September 13th, 2022. The Dene Nation calls for the immediate resignation of officials that directed and supported the raid.

According to the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation, Government of Northwest Territories wildlife officers equipped with a search warrant, helicoptered into a cultural camp on Artillery Lake and spent hours rummaging through family tents, teepees, and personal belongings. The officers indicated that they had a tip that people were harvesting within the closed zone for the Bathurst caribou. They then presented a warrant and indicated they had full authority to search the camp for evidence of illegal hunting. Officers went through every tent, cache, and location (including children's tents and belongings) where meat was stored at the camp, and took samples of meat, hair, and bone. Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation intends to challenge the validity of the warrant.

During that time, the officers stated that if anyone interfered with their investigation, they would be charged with obstruction of justice and that additional officers were available to execute the warrant by force if necessary. It was reported that children were crying, and elders were traumatized during the tent-by-tent ransacking. For elders who lived through a period where they quite literally feared wildlife officers, before constitutional protections for Indigenous rights were implemented in Canadian law, this was a tremendously triggering event.

Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine said "This was not a search of the cultural camp. This was an unwarranted, offensive raid of a camp of women, children, and elders. This is not acceptable and a clear breach and direct violation of Dene Treaty and Aboriginal rights "

The Dene Nation insists on learning if the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources for the Northwest Territories was aware of the impending raid prior to the deployment of the Officers to Łutsel K'e. Additionally, the Dene Nation supports an independent investigation into the events which took place during and leading up to the raid executed on the cultural camp.

Reconciliation in Canada is about building renewed relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition and implementation of their rights, as well as genuine respect, collaboration, and partnership. The actions which took place on September 13th demonstrate a blatant lack of respect and recognition of our inherent Dene and treaty rights and serve as a serious setback in our continued efforts to engage in meaningful reconciliation efforts.

The Government of the Northwest Territories should have contacted Łutsel K'e leadership and notified them that there was a need to execute a search. This should have been done collaboratively, in partnership with the community.

Dene National Chief Antoine also stated that “Despite the invasion and infringement of personal space, we commend and fully support the families and community of Łutsel K'e for responding peacefully”. As one of the cultural camp members said “I’ve never felt so insignificant in my life and other people felt the same way “.

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