

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release
March 23, 2020



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THE TIME IS NOW!

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau must immediately declare a National State of Emergency

(xw̓məθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), s̓kw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́l
ílwətaʔ4/sél ílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC – March 23, 2020):

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is calling on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to immediately declare a national state of emergency in response to the COVID-19, before the pandemic sweeps through Canada's most vulnerable communities, including First Nations.

Reports and data from health professionals across Canada clearly point to the COVID-19 pandemic following the same track as Europe and Asia. There is still time to take greater action to lower the curve of transmission in Canada before it is too late. Every citizen of Canada must play an active role, through maximized and enforced social distancing, in an effort to stop this devastating disease. Citizens can't afford to ignore this dire situation when lives are at risk.

"Prime Minister Trudeau must take immediate and sweeping action to declare a National State of Emergency before the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps through First Nations and vulnerable communities. Historically, First Nations communities have been devastated by pandemics and we must take decisive action now before we see our community and family members fall ill," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "We must heed the lessons of Italy, China and other countries that have felt the brunt of this pandemic."

Given the systemic social and economic inequalities that will leave Indigenous populations and other marginalized communities more susceptible to the disease, Canada must immediately move beyond optional social-distancing measures. Many remote First Nations are particularly at risk due to the lack of quick access to urgent respiratory care.

The FNLC supports those First Nations that have already declared their own community State of Emergency, under their own laws, jurisdiction and authorities, and instituted travel restrictions in order to safeguard their citizens. The FNLC encourages every First Nation community in BC to declare their own State of Emergency and to take the necessary precautionary measures to maintain health and safety in their communities.

“Every First Nations community in BC needs to act now to ensure strict social and physical distancing measures are taken immediately. All communities should be encouraged to cancel or postpone **all** cultural, community or social gatherings, meetings and events,” said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit. “Community leaders must take the necessary steps to immediately educate all of our citizens, especially the youth, so they learn the risks associated with COVID-19. As well, leaders are encouraged to involve the whole community in efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “The time for denial and bureaucratic delay about the spread of COVID-19 is over- our communities are in crisis and we are looking for answers and for resources to stop the spread of this horrendous and nightmare pandemic. Canada needs to provide increased funding for Indigenous and vulnerable communities, who are at the highest risk levels, in order to ensure they are able to purchase necessary sanitation supplies, medicines, equipment and food supplies so they can take care of their citizens.”

The FNLC recognizes and thanks all healthcare and frontline workers, and others who are providing essential services, for their commitment and sacrifices and acknowledges all those who are providing support services to our communities in this difficult time.

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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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