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VIA FAX: 250 387-6411

March 11, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We write to you today as representatives of British Columbia's largest and most prominent advocacy and service organization for off-reserve aboriginal people, the most visible and influential coalition of aboriginal leaders in British Columbia, and Canada's oldest and most active Civil Liberties advocacy organization.



B.C. Civil Liberties Association

The United Native Nations Society represents approximately 90,000 Aboriginal people within British Columbia (BC) with membership open to anyone of Aboriginal ancestry. The UNNS currently has a membership base of 11,000+ people. UNNS' major concern is to represent and protect the interests of Aboriginal people who

currently do not have a voice on government decisions affecting their life and culture. The UNNS supports on and off reserve, status and non-status, Métis and Inuit people from all areas of BC.

The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs is a coalition of Chiefs from aboriginal communities across British Columbia. The organization has been established to support the work of aboriginal people at the community, national and international level, in the fight for recognition of aboriginal rights and respect for aboriginal cultures and societies. The goal of the UBCIC is to give the aboriginal people of BC a voice strong enough to be heard in every corner of the world.

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association has been defending the freedoms and rights of Canadians since 1962. The BCCLA is concerned with issues of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, privacy and other core liberty values. In this particular context, concerns related to equal treatment of diverse communities and our interest in effective police oversight bring this matter to the attention of the BCCLA.

We are writing to you today to demand a full public Inquiry into the ongoing issue of murdered and missing women from aboriginal communities, in particular surrounding the murdered women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and the missing and murdered women who have disappeared along the “Highway of Tears” in northern British Columbia.

The aboriginal community and the community at large has heard many public statements from Attorney General Wally Oppal and spokespeople for him concerning the potential for a public Inquiry into the murdered and missing women of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. On multiple occasions, he or his spokespeople have suggested that those concerned with this issue must wait for the criminal trial of Robert Pickton to finish before the government is able to publicly inquire into the lack of response of police to missing person reports in that neighbourhood.

The first and only expected trial of Robert Pickton is now complete. We understand that the matter is now under appeal and is expected to be heard in March at the B.C. Court of Appeal. We understand further that, following this hearing and the judgment of the Court, it is quite likely that the matter will be appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The case, at any of these levels, may be sent back for trial again, and that trial may be appealed again. Given the frailty of human memories, the loss or destruction of relevant evidence with time, and the retirement or death of key witnesses, both of our organizations share an equal concern about this approach taken by the Provincial government. It is inappropriate to ask the aboriginal community to wait for years to have these matters publicly discussed and rectified based solely on government speculation that a public Inquiry could affect issues on appeal or at a second trial.

Similar to the Dziekanski (Braidwood) Inquiry, it is sometimes necessary to press ahead with an Inquiry before a matter is resolved at the criminal level, as the Inquiry is likely to last longer than the criminal process. In balancing whether to press ahead or wait, the government must consider that in Dziekanski, witnesses affected by the criminal process were put off by the Inquiry to future hearing dates, and schedules were adjusted accordingly to accommodate the criminal justice system. The same could easily

be accomplished here. Our goal must be to ensure witnesses for a potential Inquiry are called in a timely manner that permits them to remember key facts and prevents the inadvertent destruction of key documents to ensure a full and comprehensive public record. Both of our organizations participated in the Frank Paul Inquiry and saw firsthand the implications of waiting 10 years for investigation of injustice.

Women continue to go missing along the Highway of Tears and in the Downtown Eastside. The Vancouver Police and RCMP have not yet satisfied the aboriginal community or the larger community that they have addressed the errors of the past comprehensively and that they are, on a priority basis, working to find the daughters, sisters and mothers who continue to go missing. Only through a public airing of the historical and current responses of the involved law enforcement agencies, accountability for those who undermined or ignored the efforts of friends and families to track down their loved ones, and concrete documentation of the improvement and comprehensiveness of current investigation efforts can the community begin the process of healing these wounds.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter, and invite you to meet with us to outline the response of the Provincial government to this critical issue of our missing family members and friends in this, an election year, just one year out from the Olympics. The continuing concerns of the urban and reserve aboriginal communities that they receive less in terms of policing service than other communities in the Province, and that police are indifferent to the suffering and disappearance of aboriginal women along the Highway of Tears, in itself justifies an investigative and responsive process. In the context of near identical concerns from a separate City about one man having near unfettered access to mass murder marginalized women from the DTES, the majority of whom were aboriginal, commends itself to your attention and a formal response in the form of a public inquiry. We look forward to your urgent response to this continuing and pressing issue.

Yours truly,



Robert Holmes, *President*
B.C. Civil Liberties
Association



Grand Chief Phillip Stewart
Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs

David Dennis, *President*
United Native Nations