



BC FIRST NATIONS  
JUSTICE COUNCIL



## JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

### BCFNJC and FNLC applaud Final Report of the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act

*Now is time to push forward public safety and policing through self-determination*

**tkwəlniwt (Westbank), Okanagan Syilx Territory, BC** [April 29, 2022]: The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC), united with the First Nations Summit, the BC Assembly of First Nations and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (collectively the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC)), applaud the recommendations put forth in the final report of the Special Committee on the Reforming Police Act titled, “Transforming Policing and Community Safety in British Columbia.”

The presumption of diversion is a cornerstone of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy, and it is promising to see the Special Committee recognize that police must play a central role in supporting diversion of Indigenous people from the criminal justice system.

The BCFNJC and the FNLC expect all Members of the Legislative Assembly to take bold and swift action to support immediate and full implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee. A collective sense of urgency is required to ensure this province, and indeed this country, is safe for all those who call it home; in particular, Indigenous people who continue to pay the price of colonialism with their lives. This work is long overdue.

“When policing began, the RCMP was created to control Indigenous people and that story line has never changed,” said BCFNJC Chair, Doug White, Q.C. “When the Province contracts with the RCMP to operate as BC’s provincial police force, they are delegating too much authority and control away. There are other models in the country where a province has its own police force, such as in Ontario and Quebec, and we need to shape policing in a way similar so BC should be able to develop a similar model.”

“The recommendations in this report represent an enormous alignment with the BC First Nations Justice Strategy, which outlines a less harmful and more appropriate and respectful approach to policing for our people,” continued White.

**BC First Nations Justice Council**

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The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is an important international instrument that sets the "minimum" human rights standards for the "survival, dignity, and well-being" of Indigenous peoples.

"In passing the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in November 2019, British Columbia agreed that the standards of UN Declaration apply to the laws of British Columbia," said UBCIC President, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip. "This legal obligation to take all measures necessary to achieve consistency applies to the recommended new policing legislation which must achieve the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples in BC. We are expecting significant change to the legislative framework around policing to address the very real harms including death, that can result from institutionalized racism in the policing system."

BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee, stated, "We are pleased to see the Committee recognize the problematic militarization of police and its disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples both historically and in the present. Our people deserve no less than a zero-tolerance policy for racism and bias and the recognition of our inherent jurisdiction over our people and lands. We are also encouraged that the Committee has pointed towards concrete ways that British Columbia can implement the Calls for Justice and recommendations from Red Women Rising."

"In implementing the recommendations of this report, it's vital that new community safety and policing legislation must be accompanied with a new sustainable funding model for Indigenous peoples to begin establishing self-determined models of policing and public safety for their communities," stated Chief Lydia Hwitsum of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. "While we welcome the interest of the Committee in revamping police oversight, the recommendation to establish a single, independent, civilian-led oversight agency must also take into consideration the need for an Indigenous oversight body, as envisioned in the BC First Nations Justice Strategy."

The BCFNJC and FNLC will be engaging with the BC government regarding implementation of the Report's recommendations.

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### **ABOUT THE BCFNJC**

The BC First Nations Justice Council has been entrusted with the mandate to transform the justice system and create better outcomes for Indigenous people through implementation of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

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The strategy, signed March 06, 2020, was jointly developed by the BC First Nations Justice Council, BC First Nations communities and the Province of British Columbia. It includes 43 actions along two paths which involve the reformation of the current system as well as the restoration of First Nations' legal traditions and structures.

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