Nishnawbe Aski Nation

NAN CALLS FOR COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE DEATHS OF SEVEN NAN YOUTH IN THUNDER BAY

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THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose is calling on the Government of Ontario to call a Commission of Inquiry into the deaths of seven NAN youth who have died under similar circumstances since 2000 while attending school in Thunder Bay.

The call for a Commission of Inquiry comes in the wake of last week's ruling by the coroner in the Bushie Inquest that the inquest cannot proceed as the 2011 jury roll is legally invalid.
"A Commission of Inquiry is the only way to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding these tragic deaths and to find ways to prevent similar tragedies from happening again," said NAN Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose. "Last week's ruling confirms what we have suspected for years – that First Nations have been systematically excluded from the justice system. Even if an inquest into the death of Reggie Bushie could be convened, two more of our youth have died since 2007 and there is no inquest that is designed to address all seven deaths."

Reggie Bushie, 15, died in 2007 while attending school at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay. His body was recovered from the McIntyre River on November 1, 2007 and an inquest into his death was scheduled to begin in January 2009. The inquest was delayed, however, after NAN and legal counsel for the Bushie family questioned the validity of the selection process for the five-member jury.

While the death of Reggie Bushie was to be the focus of the inquest, the deaths of four other NAN youth who died in Thunder Bay under similar circumstances were to be considered as part of the overall context. Since then, two more NAN youth – Kyle Morriseau, 17, and Jordan Wabasse, 15 – have also died in Thunder Bay under similar circumstances.

"The patterns in these deaths are troubling and simply can't be ignored. It is clear that if the truth is to come out about the deaths of these seven youth nothing short of a
Commission of Inquiry will suffice," said Julian Falconer, NAN's legal counsel. "Since 2008, it has become increasingly apparent that the problem of the systematic exclusion of First Nations from the justice system was far more serious than what the public were told. The truth is coming out and various proceedings are coming to a standstill. This makes the Iacobucci review all the more important. It is up to this government to provide First Nations with a process that will credibly look at all seven deaths – the Inquest System can't do it."

On August 11, 2011, the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General announced the appointment of former Supreme Court Justice, the Honourable Frank Iacobucci, to inquire into and report on First Nation representation on Ontario jury rolls. The review will report on any relevant legislation and process including First Nations persons living on-reserve on the jury roll, from which potential jurors are selected for all jury trials and coroners' inquests.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and Ontario portions of Treaty No. 5 – an area covering two thirds of the province of Ontario.

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For more information please contact:
Amy Harris, Director of Communications – Nishnawbe Aski Nation (807) 625-4906 or (807) 252-2806 cell or by email aharris@nan.on.ca .
Dottie Goriah – Falconer-Charney LLP (416) 964-3408 ext. 243 or DottieG@falconercharney.com
For more information on the exclusion of First Nations from jury rolls:
http://fcbarristers.com/Falconer/index.html