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### **“Keep ourselves connected by staying apart” Dene National Chief Yakeleya takes guidance from Dene Elders during COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**[Yellowknife, Northwest Territories – April 13, 2020]** - This past week, Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya hosted a teleconference to hear directly from the Dene Nation Elders Council. National Chief Yakeleya was looking to seek guidance and support for the Dene people during the COVID-19 pandemic from the Council. More than a half dozen Dene elders, from Fort McPherson and Deline in the north to Fort Simpson and Kakisa in the south participated.

The Dene Nation Elders Council discussed the historical changes happening today as a result of the pandemic and encouraged all members to go out on the land, learn from Dene medicines and support each other. The Elders agreed that this is the time to focus on traditional medicine and traditional knowledge to keep communities safe from any potential spread or transmission of the virus.

“Our Elders highlighted that diseases and viruses have plagued Indigenous communities in the NWT for centuries”, said Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya. “ However, despite this, Dene people not only survived but thrived after these various epidemics. We will continue to do so as we remain steadfast in our culture, prayer and spiritual unity.”

Elders who spoke emphasized that this is not the time to ignore the healing properties of traditional medicine such as consuming clean water, berries and fish available as Dene Nation members return to the land as a form of self-isolation during this time. Stressing the importance of abstaining from substances like alcohol and other substances, the message was clear – “we are all in this together”.

“The ways of the Dene are rooted in our land and it is up to us to search for spiritual guidance and knowledge to stay safe. We will keep ourselves connected by staying apart – family is the foundation of the Dene people,” concluded National Chief Yakeleya.

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