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Dene Nation Education Summit postponed due to COVID-19 outbreak; WHO declares a global pandemic

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Yellowknife – March 11, 2020] The Dene Nation announced today that the upcoming Dene Nation Education Summit scheduled for March 17th and 18th, 2020 in Hay River has been postponed as a precautionary measure related to concerns around the spread of COVID-19 as the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic earlier today and recommended by K'at'l'odeeche First Nation Chief April Martel.

“Although there are no confirmed cases in the Northwest Territories and the risk remains low, it important we remain vigilant as cases continue to rise across Canada,” said Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya. “We will continue to monitor the situation and plan for a future date where Dene Nation leadership can gather as we move forward on our shared vision for Dene Education in the North. For most people, the immediate risk of being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to be low. However, many First Nations live in overcrowded housing and lack suitable ventilation which can facilitate the spread of respiratory and viral infections. Elders (knowledge keepers) and young children are most vulnerable to an outbreak as well those whose immune systems are compromised due to other pre-existing health conditions.”

The Dene Nation National Office is gravely concerned as there are no full-time nurses in many of its' smaller communities and will engage the GNWT Department of Health to develop a response plan that will ensure all citizens are safe and have access to services to ensure a level of comfort. The Dene Nation is also working alongside its' national counterparts at the Assembly of First Nations to ensure the health and well-being of all Dene Nation citizens. The Dene Nation will continue to update communities from across the North as information becomes available.

The first-ever Dene Nation Education Summit was scheduled for March 17th and 18th, 2020 in K'at'l'odeeche First Nation in Hay River. Based on a need for more training, cultural and language-based education and mental health supports to ensure a strong foundation for youth to excel, the Summit was to engage Dene leadership and work to develop a shared vision for Indigenous education in the Northwest Territories.

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“Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interests of the Dene Nation”