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Dene Nation Leading Policing Transformation to Address Systemic Racism towards Indigenous Peoples

[Yellowknife, Northwest Territories – June 21, 2021] - Dene Nation is spearheading a program to transform systemic racism against Indigenous peoples in Canadian policing, with a first-of-its-kind pilot program developed in partnership with the Northwest Territories (NWT) RCMP.

“There is no time to waste on activating transformational change within Canadian policing by breaking down the walls of systemic racism. For far too long, our people have been held down by the unequal application of the Canadian justice system, which has contributed to an ongoing cycle of intergenerational pain and trauma,” said Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya. “Indigenous peoples are ready to move beyond platitudes that denounce racism and move towards tangible, clear and implementable action that transforms policing and justice systems.”

Partners have made their shared commitment clear: Working towards permanently ending systemic racism in Canadian policing while making a generational difference for all people within Canada.

The methodology of the pilot program, developed by Unstoppable Conversations on behalf of the Dene Nation, is adopted from successful examples in other jurisdictions, including post-Apartheid South Africa and Northern Ireland. Within Canada, the Coburg Police Department has already begun high-level implementation of elements of the program. The pilot will be across the NWT with ten (10) NT RCMP employees from various duties and 10 Indigenous leaders engaging together in a series of unique workshops.

“This is an opportunity to bring to life the Truth and Reconciliation Calls-to-Action while demonstrating a new way forward in Canada for policing and justice that reflects unity between Indigenous and Canadian leadership,” continued Dene National Chief Yakeleya. “However, it is crucial that this is an Indigenous-led process. The only way we can make effective, long-lasting change is to employ the principle of ‘Nothing About Us, Without Us’; understanding lived experiences must be a key part of breaking down the walls of colonial justice systems.”

Quote from Commanding Officer, Northwest Territories RCMP C/ Supt. J. Zettler

“The RCMP in the Northwest Territories over the years have developed an awareness to reconciliation, systemic racism, intergenerational trauma and cultural awareness with our communities. The Northwest Territories (NT) RCMP will need to continue developing our understanding on this path with our communities. With this evolving awareness and knowledge, the NT RCMP must transition to “operationalize” this knowledge in our duties. This will look very different in five or ten years as it evolves and continually changes as we learn from our communities what has worked and what has not. Some things will not meet our expected results, while others may exceed them. The most important aspect will be that we continue our open bilateral dialogue with the communities as we grow this important relationship. I believe this is the next step in our evolution in the Northwest Territories and look forward to the ongoing work with the Dene Nation.”

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