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THE DENE NATION CALLS FOR A FULL INDEPENDENT PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE TO THE 2023 WILDFIRES IN THE NWT.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[YELLOWKNIFE, DENENDEH - OCTOBER 12, 2023] It has been an unprecedented year for wildfires in the NWT with almost 70% of the population being evacuated to communities across the NWT and western Canada. The Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine says “there is much to discuss about the wildfire experience this summer. The best way to do this is to have a full independent public inquiry that encourages everyone in our communities to talk about it.”

A state of emergency was called and 13 communities including Behchoko, Fort Smith, Salt River First Nation, Smith Landing First Nation, Jean Marie River, West Point First Nation, Hay River, K'atl'odeeche First Nation, Enterprise, Ndilq, Dettah, Yellowknife and Kakisa were evacuated.

He went on to say “some people were away from their home community and unsettled in unfamiliar surroundings for over a month. The community of Enterprise was almost completely destroyed and West Point First Nation, the town of Hay River, and K'atl'odeeche reserve were evacuated twice. We must discuss lessons learned and how to prepare for next spring and into the future.”

The climate catastrophe will continue, and uncertainty will be the norm. The Dene National Chief concluded by emphasizing that “above all, we must incorporate Dene knowledge into our emergency response to wildfires. Our People have been here since the beginning of time and have always relied on our own understanding of the land and the environment around us to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Clearly, emergency management and response in the NWT must incorporate the expertise of the Dene.”

The Dene Nation calls for the full independent public inquiry to begin as soon as possible. Some of the fires will burn underground all winter and will resurface in the spring. Dene authority and governance must be recognized and included in all response plans going forward.

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