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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 25th, 2023 – Yellowknife, Denendeh

The Legislative Assembly must only deal with the evacuation of wildfires and delaying the upcoming Territorial election

It has come to the attention of the Dene Nation through the media that the legislative Assembly will be convening in Inuvik, NT on August 28th, 2023 (next Monday).

It is expected that they will pass legislation to delay the upcoming Territorial election as recommended by the Chief electoral officer and authorize emergency spending for the wildfires. There is also speculation that the 19th Assembly will be recalled to meet in late September to conclude other outstanding business. They were scheduled to meet earlier this month but were postponed due to the many evacuations.

The Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine stated that “the safety, protection and well-being of our people is the greatest priority, therefore we can see that it is necessary to convene the Legislative Assembly to deal with emergency funding related to the cause of the wildfire. In addition the discussion on delaying the territorial election should also take place. However, approving the Legislative Assembly to sit and deal with other issues so late in their terms is not essential.”

He went on to say “as leaders we need to focus on the safety and care of the 11 evacuated communities including, Ft. Smith, Salt River First Nation, Smiths Landing First Nation, Hay River, West Point First Nation, K'at'l'odeeche Dene Reserve, Kakisa, Enterprise, Ndilo, Dettah and Yellowknife. We also have Behchoko and Jean Marie River who are still returning to their communities.”

“We have thousands of evacuees totalling more than 60% of our population scattered across the Northwest Territories, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba centres. There is great anxiety and concern in the minds of our people and their families who have been impacted. The safety and care of these people has to be our top priority. If proposed legislation has to die on the order papers, then so be it.”

Over the years, legislation has not passed for many reasons and the next legislative Assembly deals with these issues. “The Dene Nation strongly recommends that there not be a session held in late September” added the Dene National Chief.

The National Chief also said “Additional financial resources are required for fire related issues. The Dene call upon the Crown in Right of Canada to honour its legal obligation under Treaty #8 and #11, and provide sufficient funds to the Dene First Nations, and not through a third party such as the GNWT. The Chiefs are responsible for their territories and peoples, and know best how to allocate funding. The Crown is legally obligated to the Dene, and responsible to provide this financing.”

“It is clear from our Covid-19 experiences and the climate catastrophe, that the Dene require clear protocols spelled out with Federal, Territorial and municipal governments. The roles and responsibilities have to be understood and implemented for the safety and protection of our citizens. The Dene go to their Chiefs for leadership in times of emergency not the mayors or the Premier” concluded the Dene National Chief.

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