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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DENE NATIONAL CHIEF CALLS FOR COORDINATED RESOURCES FOR THE SAFE RETURN OF EVACUEES

SEPTEMBER 1, 2023, Denendeh – The Dene National Chief Gerald Antoine, has called for a coordinated response to the challenges facing the return of evacuated and affected persons during the Northwest Territories wildfire catastrophe. The Government of the Northwest Territories process has demonstrated a lack of efficient tracking of all the evacuated persons from the NWT who are scattered across Western Canada. Transparency is vital, as there is a dire need for communication through a coordinated effort.

The Dene Nation is calling for a coordinated response with the Canadian Red Cross, Government of the NWT, Akaitcho, Tlicho, DehCho, Sahtu, Gwich'in, Metis and Inuvialuit leaders - with the City Governments and those of BC, Alberta, Yukon, and Manitoba and where we have the bulk of our citizens.

Dene National Chief Antoine states, “ The process of the evacuation of residents from Denendeh have been likened to the forceful removal and displacement of Indigenous persons since contact with Colonizers. Many have been herded like livestock without communication, and information. Some have been without basics like food, and safe shelter and are under great financial stress. Many with health and wellness issues have also not been supported resulting in persons being further displaced and missing.” He also notes there are many elders and persons with no identification, or language interpretation and translation services.

Our obligation is to advocate for the safety, protection and health of our people and the essential basic needs with the transition when they return home. The Dene Nation sees the dire need for a coordinated response to support and assist our people. The Dene National Chief has called upon the Canadian Red Cross office to provide the support to outline the services and challenges of serving the needs of evacuees during this wildfire catastrophe. Dene National Chief Antoine added, “The greatest achievements have been by our own people, community members, community and regional governments, our neighbours and friends who have stepped forward to provide the basic needs of evacuees. For this, we extend our appreciation and thanks for sharing what you have with those in need.”

There is a requirement for transparent, clear processes for our communities and regional governments and agencies to have a coordinated list of all who are displaced, where they are, and the clear and detailed plan of how they will be returned home. Our obligation is to advocate for the health and safety of our people. The Government of the NWT has demonstrated their need for assistance. The Dene Nation is calling for a coordinated strategy to help and assist the basic needs, health and safety of all our peoples who live in the Northwest Territories.

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