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NEWS RELEASE

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BCAFN SUPPORTS JUSTICE FOR TINA FONTAINE: JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORMS NEEDED

(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC) – Yesterday a jury in Winnipeg found Raymond Cormier not guilty of second degree murder of Tina Fontaine, of the Sagkeeng First Nation. Tina was 15 years old when she was found dead in the Red River, wrapped in a duvet cover, weighed down with rocks, on August 17, 2014. Her death sparked an uproar across Canada to seek justice for over 1,500 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. There is a national crisis as it relates to the systems to protect Indigenous children, women and girls: Tina Fontaine is one of too many – everything must change.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Tina Fontaine. We stand with the family in seeking justice for Tina”, stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. He added, “This isn’t just about a systemic problem with child welfare programs – there are deep rooted elements of racism and colonialism that must be addressed. Reconciliation will not be an easy path, but one we must continue to travel together, for the sake of Tina, and thousands of children in a similar situation.”

Tina Fontaine’s case has been a high profile one, which was one of many that pushed for the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. With the recent not-guilty decision by a jury in Saskatchewan in the death of Colton Boushie, there is a growing acknowledgement too that justice in Canada for Indigenous people is not working. It is in crisis.

Regional Chief Teegee noted, “As leaders, citizens, and parents, we must do better. We must create new systems that work for First Nations cultures, traditions and jurisdictions; it must cover prevention, care and ongoing support. We will rebuild our families and heal together.”

These last two cases involving Boushie and Fontaine are showing us that the judicial system is on trial – and has failed us all. Regional Chief Teegee said, “There can’t be reconciliation without justice. All the systems have been tested and have failed us. We are calling on immediate changes from Prime Minister Trudeau and Justice Minister Wilson-Raybould. We can’t just be talking about ‘engaging for change’. First Nations are fed up. We must do better now before more of our children are killed.” In BC there are too many unsolved cases of murdered and missing women and girls, accounting for over one-third of unsolved cases nationally, according the Native Women’s Association of Canada.

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