

NEWS RELEASE

December 17, 2010

For immediate release

Shuswap Nation Tribal Council

“We Don’t Want to Lose Them.”

American President Obama's Support for the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signals a new era in the protection of native children and families.

“The President stated his country’s ‘respect for the institutions and rich cultures of native peoples’ and pledged to ‘take actions that match those words’,” said Chief Wayne Christian (Tribal Spokesperson, Shuswap Nation Tribal Council). “Along with Canada's endorsement of the U.N. Declaration and B.C.'s support of the Stsmémelt Project, we see the global community recognizing First Nations jurisdiction as the best means to reduce the number of native children taken into government care,” he added.

“The U.N. Declaration prevents outside authorities from forcibly removing children,” said Chief Christian. “It means that we have the right to say that no children leave our families, and, if they have to, we are part of the decision on where they will go, how they will be cared for and when they are coming back,” he added.

“We are also protected from assimilation or the destruction of our culture,” said Chief Terry Porter (St’uxwtéws/Bonaparte Indian Band). “In our culture, if a child is alone, we bring them into a family. By staying in their community, they grow up knowing their relatives and hearing the stories that give them a sense of place and belonging,” he added.

“This past year, we’ve traveled to Secwepemc communities to listen to peoples’ stories about their child welfare experience and to ask them their dream for the future,” said Lynn Kenoras (Community Engagement Facilitator, Stsmémelt Project). “There’s growing hope for our children. We don’t want to lose them,” she added.

“The Stsmémelt Project carries on the success of Spallumcheen By-law #3, which recognized Splatsin’s sole jurisdiction over child welfare,” said Chief Christian. “Since 1980, our registered population has grown from about 350 to nearly 800 and we know where every child is,” he added.

“The Minister of Indian Affairs has stated that the UN Declaration is ‘consistent’ with Ottawa’s agenda. Prime Minister Harper has committed to a Crown-First nations summit meeting,” said Chief Christian. “We count on the federal government to commit real and tangible resources to realizing First Nations jurisdiction over native children and families,” he added.

-30-

Media Contact:

Walter Quinlan

778.471.8200