



FSIN Joint Media Release

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NORTHERN PUBLIC HEALTH ORDER DISCRIMINATES AGAINST NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN RESIDENTS

(Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatoon SK) – The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) Executive is in full support of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the Metis Nation – Saskatchewan, who say the Provincial Government’s security check points in the North have gone too far. In a complaint letter sent to Saskatchewan’s Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab, the Northern Chiefs say several complaints are being made against security officers for unfair and disrespectful treatment.

“It disturbs me that the North is being discriminated against and treated unfairly. We were not consulted despite what the Provincial Health Order states,” says Canoe Lake Cree First Nation (CLCFN) Chief Francis Iron. “These officers have free interpretation of the Public Health Order and a complete lack of respect towards the leadership of the North. I was denied access through the check point while trying to drive to Flying Dust First Nation near Meadow Lake. Our First Nation primary cheque signatory lives in Flying Dust and our families on social assistance and the First Nation payroll depend on those cheques and we need to pay our bills. These officers also have no regard of what an essential service for northerners is.”

Chief Iron is not the only recipient of the ignorant and aggressive treatment from Saskatchewan Conservation Officers at these check points. “I have witnessed it firsthand,” says English River First Nation Chief Jerry Bernard. “This Public Health Order is also restricting essential services to our community. We strongly believe that shopping for groceries in Meadow Lake is essential for our communities because there are shortages of goods and services all over the North and we are being forced into positions that make our communities even more vulnerable. My community members are being threatened to be charged by officers if on their ‘essential trip,’ they try to bring groceries back through the security check points. This ignorant, disrespectful and threatening treatment must stop immediately.”

Public Health Order states: *Persons may travel to the community closest to their community of primary residence taking the most direct route to obtain essential goods and services when those goods are not available in their community of primary residence.*

The leadership point out, the Public Health Order for the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District, does not recognize the Northern stores are stocked with basic goods, but they do not meet the

requirements for all of their citizens. “Our community needs include specialized diets, baby and infant foods and essentials, dry goods, and home supplies that are difficult to shop for North of Meadow Lake” says Meadow Lake Tribal Council Tribal Chief Richard Ben. “Our Chiefs support some sections of this Public Health Order, but other sections are causing real concerns and problems for our First Nations. We all want to keep this pandemic out of our communities, but we all have to remember that we are in this together. Our North is suffering, and we will not tolerate disrespect and threats against northerners at these check stops.”

“With this COVID-19 situation we find ourselves in, MN-S Health Minister Marg Friesen, Northern Region 2 Representative Leonard Montgrand, Northern Region 3 Representative Tex Bouvier and myself, as leaders with community concerns, acted in a timely way establishing checkpoints in the Northwest working with Métis, First Nations and municipal leaders. The travel restrictions were put in place, making the safety of our citizens the number one priority,” said Métis Nation – Saskatchewan President Glen McCallum. “The Provincial involvement came later and the officers that have taken over the checkpoints are not taking our citizens and their unique circumstances living in an isolated place into consideration. The cooperation among our leaders and community will continue and governments should be working in partnership. The public health order must continue to provide the appropriate information to citizens in a respectful manner.”

“We are encouraging all levels of Government – Federal, Provincial, local, First Nations and Metis, to work with one another and implement our recommendations as we see fit” says FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron. “We support the northern communities and the leadership on their recommendations to stop the spread of COVID-19. We have positive solutions that will help the whole province and flatten the curve.”

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations represents 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan. The Federation is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties, as well as the promotion, protection and implementation of the Treaty promises that were made more than a century ago.

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For More Information or to coordinate interviews, please contact:

FSIN Communications

Larissa Burnouf

Cell : 306-291-6864

communications@fsin.com

larissa.burnouf@fsin.com

MLTC Communications

Howie Summers

howie.summers@mltc.net

MN-S Communications

Julia Burns

jburns@mns.work