MEDIA RELEASE | November 9, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Syilx Okanagan Nation Chiefs Condemn Violence Against Women and Reject the Appeal of Donald Ashley

kiʔlawnaʔ (Kelowna, BC), Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory: On November 13, 2026, Donald Wayne Ashley is scheduled to appear before the Court of Appeal at Kelowna Law Courts. The appeal marks another difficult chapter for six Syilx women and their families, who have spent four years seeking accountability for acts of bodily, spiritual and emotional abuse committed during what Ashley claimed were traditional healing sessions.

Following the 2022 assaults, survivors, their families, and frontline support workers were forced through a nightmare of adversarial court proceedings. They endured endless procedural delays, tactical motions, heartless interrogation, and hostile cross-examinations within a colonial justice system that routinely dismisses and diminishes First Nations women, leaving them feeling ostracized and disenfranchised.

What our Syilx Okanagan experienced, observed and documented was no meaningful justice nor accountability. Of the original six sexual assault charges, four were dropped, and ultimately, Ashley was convicted of only one count of common assault. In August 2025, he received a two-year probation order.

Ashley's appeal is a purely self-serving, desperate attempt to evade legal consequences that forces survivors to revisit the trauma they have spent years working to heal, dragging them back into the exhausting trauma of the courtroom.

“The Syilx Okanagan Nation stands resolutely behind our women survivors and their families in condemning this shameful appeal as an unconscionable attempt to evade the barest semblance of legal accountability," Chief Greg Gabriel states. “This systemic betrayal unfolds against an intolerable national reality: First Nations women face sexual violence rates more than double those of non-Indigenous women.”

The psychological toll of this violence is catastrophic, **41% of Indigenous people who experienced physical or sexual assault reported having seriously considered suicide**[1], a direct consequence of compounded trauma and institutional abandonment.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation makes this unequivocally clear**: an acquittal or withdrawal on technical legal grounds under western rules of evidence is not an exoneration, nor does it erase Ashley’s guilt under Syilx law.** Ashley’s actions were predatory, exploitative and a profound violation of sacred trust. No claimed intention of healing or “traditional medicine practices” can erase the absence of consent or be used to excuse harm and avoid accountability. The Supreme Court of Canada reinforced the importance of accountability in *R. v. Cope* (2026 SCC 32), affirming an offender’s Gladue factors considerations must not outweigh the need to hold perpetrators accountable for violence against First Nations women.

Regardless of the appellate court's decision, the Syilx Okanagan Nation's commitment to our women remains absolute. These values are rooted in Syilx law and align with the principles outlined in the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, which affirms our inherent right to self-determination and the protection of our people.

In words that reflect the strength and resilience of those who came forward, one survivor shared: *"The harm I now carry has changed me in ways I never asked for, but has also revealed my strength… We are still here, and we will always be here."*

Case Reference Details:

- Court of Appeal File No.: CA51015 (Kelowna Law Courts)
- Underlying Supreme Court File No.: 49793-2

MEDIA CONTACT:

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Support Resources:
The Syilx Okanagan Nation encourages all members to access available supports and resources to assist with healing and safety.

If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized or gender-based violence, support is available through ONA Crisis Services (YES / ONRT) at 250-707-0095 or the 24/7 KUU-US Indigenous Crisis Line at 1-800-588-8717.

For assistance, please contact:

Jenny Louis, ONRT Coordinator
Email: jlouis@syilx.org
Phone: (250) 681-3765

National Crisis Centre of BC
Phone: 310-6789

Sources

[1] Statistics Canada. (2022). Victimization of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in Canada. Statistics Canada Report.