

SYILX OKANAGAN NATION CHIEFS APPALLED AT COMPLETE LACK OF JUSTICE FOR THE HARMS CAUSED TO SYILX WOMEN BY DONALD ASHLEY

snpink'tn (Penticton British Columbia), Syilx Territory: The Chiefs of the Syilx Okanagan Nation stand united in their condemnation of Donald Ashley, the grievous harms he caused to Syilx Nation women while under the guise of a medicine man, and the utter lack of justice served on Mr. Ashley by the Canadian legal system.

“Our Nation will not tolerate violence against our women,” said the Chiefs collectively. “We honor the bravery of the survivors who came forward to ensure justice was served. We remain steadfast in our commitment to protecting our people and creating a future where such acts of violence no longer occur.”

Between October and November of 2022, six Syilx Nation women came forward to report that Mr. Ashley had, allegedly, touched them inappropriately during healing sessions that he offered. This resulted in six initial charges of sexual assault. The court process would take 2 years before resulting in a trial, which took place between September and October of 2024. Despite the heartrending, weeks-long testimony of the six brave women who came forward, BC Supreme Court Judge Michael Brundrett and the jury stated that there was not enough evidence to convict Mr. Ashley of any of the sexual assault charges. The only charge laid against Mr. Ashley was one count of common assault.

“This criminal justice system failed our women once again. They made this sexual predator out to be a victim throughout this trial,” said Penticton Indian Band Chief Greg Gabriel, following the verdict being released. When asked about his views on how the court system handled the trial, Chief Gabriel noted, “We have to fix this damn justice system so these poor women that have been abused don’t have to carry that with them forever. He gets to walk away free, but they have to live with what he did. He’s a predator and he’s brought such disgrace to a very sacred part of our traditions and healing.” Chief Gabriel’s condemnation of the justice system and the lack of true justice received by Indigenous women echoes statements made over many decades. The Canadian justice system has failed Indigenous women, as well as girls and 2-spirit folks, for over a century. These failings are clearly outlined in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, “Reclaiming Power and Place”.

“Violence against women in any form is unacceptable and a direct violation of Syilx laws and values,” said Chief Clarence Louie, Chair of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. “As leaders, we have a responsibility to stand up against violence and ensure the safety and dignity of our people, specifically women and girls.”

The Syilx Okanagan Nation has a sacred responsibility to protect our women, who are the lifeblood and knowledge-keepers of our Nation. These values are rooted in Syilx law and align with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms our inherent right to self-determination and the protection of our people. As part of this sacred responsibility, the Syilx Okanagan Nation Chiefs signed a Tribal Council Resolution, banishing Donald Ashley from all Syilx Okanagan Nation lands, including the territories of all seven member communities. Mr. Ashley is here forth banned from entering, residing in or participating in events on any part of Syilx Okanagan Nation lands. Nation and Community administration and workers are committed to monitoring and reporting on Mr. Ashley’s compliance with this resolution.

Chief Gabriel stated that “we are firmly with the survivors and their families as they heal, the safety of our women is a priority, and we will continue to advocate for justice and resources that support the long-term well-being of our communities. We also call on provincial and federal governments to meet their obligations under UNDRIP and the Calls for Justice from the MMIWG Inquiry.”

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) has highlighted the urgent need for action to address the systemic violence faced by Indigenous women. The Chiefs emphasized the Syilx Okanagan Nation’s commitment to strengthening community safety through culturally relevant prevention and healing programs.

For More Information Contact

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