

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 23, 2007**

CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS INITIATIVE URGENTLY NEEDED

On October 12, the RCMP stated that their investigation of missing and murdered women in the Highway of Tears investigation had expanded from nine to 18 women. Their review expanded the geographic scope of the Highway of Tears from the 800 kilometers between Prince George and Prince Rupert to now include the Kamloops to Prince George corridor.

“It has been 16 months since the Highway of Tears Symposium where recommendations were brought forward to provide clear direction on how all communities must work together with government ministries and RCMP in a collective effort to prevent more tragedies along the Highway of Tears” stated Lisa Krebs, Coordinator for the Highway of Tears Initiative. “With the RCMP now expanding the number of cases and area, it is vitally crucial that we all work together to implement the report’s recommendations.”

The Highway of Tears Symposium held in Prince George in March 2006 was organized by First Nations and Aboriginal organizations in the Prince George area to address the numerous disappearance and murders that have occurred along Highway 16, the Highway of Tears, over the past two decades. The symposium’s participants included the victims’ families, provincial ministries, senior officers of the RCMP, elected officials, and concerned citizens. The Highway of Tears Recommendations Report and its 33 recommendations were released on June 21, 2006.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and member of the First Nations Leadership Council observed, “We must learn from and act upon the recommendations of the report. The recommendations were written by those who cared, loved and cherished the missing and murdered women of the Highway of Tears. We cannot allow these tragedies to fall by the wayside; we must continue to fully support the great efforts to implement the recommendations. Doing so, we hope we can aid in the expanding investigations and perhaps prevent another senseless and tragic death.”

The first recommendation to be acted upon was to hire Lisa Krebs as Coordinator for the Highway of Tears Initiative. Krebs has worked extensively on education and awareness campaigns, organized community forums that address and formalize the various recommendations of the Recommendations Report, and acting as the liaison between families, communities and the RCMP.

“It is due to ongoing work, which Krebs plays a major role in, that significant and tangible changes have occurred within our region. The RCMP has altered their protocol allowing officers to stop and speak to hitchhikers. It is due to the coordinated efforts of RCMP, surrounding communities and Krebs that there has been a more focused effort on resolving these disappearances and murders,” said Rena Zatorski, Councillor for the Lheidli T’enneh Band.

“There is an immediate need for provincial funding to continue with the much needed work. John Les, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, publicly stated his dedication and resolve in contributing resources to the Highway of Tears Initiative. Moreover, Premier Campbell has dedicated himself to creating a New Relationship with First Nations. It is very unfortunate that there is no provincial funding dedicated to the Highway of Tears Initiative to bring peace to the families of the victims, to organize educations/awareness campaigns and to coordinate preventative measures,” concluded Mary Teegee, Director for the Carrier Sekani Family Services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Grand Chief Stewart Phillip

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BACKGROUND: HIGHWAY OF TEARS INITIATIVE PROGRESS REPORT

HIGHWAY OF TEARS INITIATIVE PROGRESS REPORT

1. Victim Prevention

- Community Forums (10, 11, 12 – hoping to develop 13 from the info we gather)
 - The *Highway of Tears Community Forums* is the first formalized initiative to actually address recommendations from the *Recommendations Report*.
 - Forums Completed to date include: Nakazdli – June 12, 13; Moricetown – June 15, 16; Stellat'en – July 5, 6; Hazelton – July 17, 18;
 - Next Forums: Burns Lake – October 19, 20; Terrace – TBA; Prince Rupert – TBA.
- Signage (9)
 - Signs have been placed in Moricetown, Terrace and through donations, funding exists for an additional three (3) signs, location TBA.
- Education and Awareness (14)
 - Workshops at two youth conferences (over 150 youth);
 - 12 presentations, 2 major conferences
 - Over 30 interviews with media, locally and provincially;
 - HoT CD – Contribution Agreement;
 - CNC – Street Humanities Bench / HoT Bench;
 - Support for one youth at Future Cents
 - 2 Screenings of Film “Finding Dawn” (over 350 people);
 - Discussions around Donation of Highway of Tears Art Exhibit;
 - Loose linkages to other Communities’ local campaigns, such Smithers Community Action Committee.
- RCMP Patrols Highway 16 (2)
 - RCMP have changed their protocol to state that an officer must stop to speak to hitchhikers “if duties permit”.
- Hitchhiker detection program for Highway 16
 - BCGEU Safety Committee wants to collaborate on a program to “detect” and register hitchhikers. A proposal is forthcoming to Telus re: a 1-800 number to begin this important step.

2. Emergency Planning and Team Response

- Smithers Community Action Group (1-6)
 - Multi-agency, local approach to finding Smithers-based solutions to implementing the HoT Symposium Recommendations.
 - First meeting was held on November 16, 2006 over 150 people attended.
 - Similarly to the HoT Symposium, break out sessions discussing the four main themes were facilitated. The Smithers Community Action Group continues to meet and address the Recommendations.

3. Victim Family Counselling and Support

- Support for Families – 1 Healing Walk / 1 annual walk
- Community Forums (6)
 - The Victim Services (VS) portion of the Forums is to discuss and identify:
 - Victimization;
 - How VS could meet the needs of the Aboriginal Community;
 - Reducing the barriers to accessing Victim Services within rural communities and;
 - People in the communities that may be doing this role already and to provide training and support for them.
- Website (4)
 - Proposal to create an interactive website, similar to the Air India website for families to receive information and updates and to connect and support each other. At this time, support is being gathered by questionnaire for families of all 18 of the missing and murdered women.
- Healing Camps (4)
 - A proposal to provide the families with two healing camps per year.
 - These camps will coincide with the biannual updates from RCMP and focus on support for the families.
 - Camps will be held in the Wet'suwet'en traditional territory and focus includes:
 - Traditional Healing, Talking Circles and Elder support;
 - Grief and loss Counseling;
 - Self-care and support planning for families within their own communities;
 - Inter-family and media communication skills.

4. Community Development and Support Strategy

- Governing Body (2) is in place, first meeting happened on December 8, 2006 and continues to meet regularly. There are representatives from each of the five stakeholder Groups identified in the symposium report.