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News Release

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Vancouver Police Endanger Indigenous Women and Child on MMIWG Day of Awareness

((X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk^wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – May 7, 2021) The Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (“the Coalition”) is appalled that on May 5th, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Vancouver Police willfully and negligently endangered the lives of several Indigenous women, including a mother and her young child.

Morgan Aysouf is a highly respected artist from the Ts'msyen Eagle Clan from Ksyeeen River who has spent years honouring Ts'msyen culture and empowering Indigenous women, matriarchs, and girls to hold and protect their sacred relationships with the land. At 3 pm on May 5, 2021, Morgan and her five-year-old daughter who had participated in a MMIWG event, were exiting the Cambie Bridge as the event wound down and which had been cordoned off for the action, alongside other participants. Instead of stopping traffic until the group was safely off the bridge or escorting the group off the bridge, police suddenly allowed the full, rush-hour traffic through and ignored the group's cries for help. Turning an indifferent eye, the police drove off and left Morgan, her young daughter, and others to fend for themselves through speeding traffic. Fortunately, they were able to receive aid from two Indigenous women driving by. On a day that represents resilience, hope, and light to those fighting to banish the dark shadows cast by centuries of gendered colonial violence, it is unacceptable and deeply hurtful that these women were met not with support and compassion, but a callous and colonial disregard for their safety and well-being.

“Their spirits will know we care about them,’ my daughter said to me as she held a cut out of a red dress bigger than her proudly over her head. She was so excited to gather with our community and participate in honouring our missing women and girls and two spirit people. But in the instant the police unleashed rush-hour traffic towards us, blatantly ignoring our calls for help, they displayed the type of systemic violence that our people have been the targets of for centuries. Their disregard is violence, and it could have been deadly,” said Morgan Asoyuf. “Not only is my daughter growing up in a country that has tried to erase us, but even on a National Day of Awareness for MMIWG that is meant for our people, there is no rest. Today my little girl learned a hard lesson, one that no child, no person, should ever have to learn.”

Lorelei Williams, founder of Butterflies in Spirit and family member stated, “In the City of Vancouver racism is endemic. This racism is both personal and systemic. The City is populated by racists and

its institutions employ racists and are designed to produce racist outcomes when interacting with Indigenous peoples – and the city doesn't seem to be providing training to every level to actually address this racism. Therefore, it is not surprising that the VPD officer acted in that manner. The VPD is replete with racist officers. All of the people who failed to stop for the little girl should be ashamed of themselves. Thank you to the two Indigenous people who stopped to help them. The City of Vancouver should be ashamed of itself as well. This is a city that lauds itself as one that exemplifies the ideals of social justice, but in throwing away banners that were clearly in support of MMIWG2S this city has exposed its hypocrisy. They just threw our families out like garbage. I have always said Canada is racist and these two incidents have proven my claims true. To compound the systemic racism inherent in Canada's institutions, Indigenous people must now also suffer the racism perpetrated by Instagram. The entire system is set against us, and now Instagram has also joined the ranks of those bent on silencing and erasing the voices and culture of Indigenous people."

"On a day intended to honour and mourn the missing and murdered Indigenous woman and girls crisis, a Vancouver police officer allowed traffic to almost hit a group of us. The Vancouver police have a violence problem, and it is the responsibility of everybody to hold them accountable," said Sii-iam Hamilton, member of Butterflies in Spirit.

"This is yet again another alarming example of how the VPD only exists to serve and protect settler society and to advance the settler-colonial agenda - an agenda that is at the root of MMIWG. The VPD's inaction in this situation violates the rule of law and smacks of blatant racism and disregard for human life. The BCCLA recently submitted extensive submissions to BC's Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act including several recommendations aimed at a complete overhaul of policing in BC. Until such time, the BCCLA calls on the VPD to immediately hold the officers accountable for failing to keep our community members safe" said Veronica Martisius, BCCLA staff counsel.

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The Coalition is a broad network of individuals, grassroots, and social justice organizations who have come together to address the ongoing crisis of murdered and disappeared Indigenous women and girls in BC and across Canada. The Coalition and its members have advocated long and hard for a thorough and meaningful inquiry into violence against Indigenous women and girls, one that would offer clear steps towards the structural change needed across Canada to finally end the systemic violence faced by Indigenous women and girls.

For more information, please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca