



September 8, 2022

Honourable Micheal Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia
Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety
By email only: PSSG.Minister@gov.bc.ca; Marco.Mendicino@parl.gc.ca

Re: RCMP Killing of Jimmie Johannesson and the Urgent Need to Protect First Nation Lives from Police Violence

Sent by Email

Dear Ministers Farnworth and Mendicino,

We write to you as a group of individuals and organizations amid an ongoing, disturbing, and unacceptable pattern of violence perpetuated against First Nations individuals by policing agencies in all corners of British Columbia and Canada.

Our letter is prompted by the RCMP killing of Haida Elder Jimmie Johannesson five months ago today. In the wake of his violent and inhumane death, Jimmie's sister Ruby Marks and our supporting organizations are calling for your governments to take immediate action to protect First Nations and other racialized communities from police violence.

What we Know About the RCMP Killing of Haida Elder Jimmie Johannesson

Five months ago today, at approximately 10:00 am, multiple Surrey RCMP officers attended the home of Haida Elder Jimmie Johannesson. Elder Jimmie called police that morning out of concern that he was a danger to himself. In response to this Elder's call for help, the Emergency Response Team (whose officers wear military-style uniforms) and armed RCMP Officers were dispatched and surrounded his home. The RCMP's lack of training around mental health, de-escalation and safe disarming techniques then saw them opening fire in his home where Jimmie was shot in the arm, leg, and twice in the heart.

What began as a desperate cry for help ended in a senseless tragedy at the hands of the state when Jimmie was pronounced dead at the hospital.

While governments prioritize half-measures and incremental change, the caseload of the IIO has doubled over the past two years and people continue to needlessly die by police hands. Police oversight agencies remain ineffective in holding police accountable; fewer than 10% of police watchdog investigations in Canada end in charges against officers,¹ and the IIO rarely refers cases to Crown Counsel for consideration of charges.²

Furthermore, agencies like the IIO lack Indigenous leadership, cultural oversight, and cultural safety and protections for victims, survivors and families in the aftermath of police violence and state-sanctioned murder.

We therefore call upon the governments of British Columbia and Canada to implement the following changes immediately:

1. Wellness Checks

- Eliminate police officer involvement in wellness checks. Reallocate resources to a peer-led mental health emergency response team trained in de-escalation and professional mental health professions whose practices are rooted in and informed by the community, all while prioritizing crisis support and care for the distressed person or family.

2. Police Services

- Implement the recommendations of the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act, per UBCIC [Resolution 2022-26](#)
- Establish a civilian traffic and bylaw services division. Armed and uniformed police are unnecessary for traffic-related offences, especially given that police are more likely to stop Black and Indigenous people for traffic infractions and many of those infractions escalate and [end in murder](#).
- End police checks. The practice of police conducting street checks outside of an investigation is discriminatory and violates people's privacy, exposing them to further surveillance and potential criminalization.
- Establish explicit, sanction-backed legal duties for police to cooperate with IIO investigations and for police and the IIO to safeguard evidence.

3. Indigenous Justice

- Implement the [Calls to Action](#) report released by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

¹ Amy Smart, CBC News (Jul 03, 2020) "Fewer than 10% of police watchdog investigations in Canada end in charges against officers, analysis finds", available online: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/police-watchdog-investigations-end-in-charges-1.5636331>

² Annual Reports of the IIO indicate the following: [94 investigations resulted in 12 referrals in 2021-2022](#), [104 investigations resulted in 8 referrals in 2020-2021](#) and [193 investigations resulted in 6 referrals in 2019-2020](#).

- Implement the National Indigenous Justice Summit's [Immediate Action Plan](#)
- UBCIC has previously called for a robust National Indigenous Justice Strategy; these recent and ongoing actions indicate this is still sorely needed

4. Independent Investigations Office

- Appoint an Indigenous Civilian Monitor, or a separate board of Indigenous Civilian Monitors, to oversee each investigation where an Indigenous person is identified as a victim or affected party in an incident of death, serious harm, or reportable injury
- Recruit Black and Indigenous investigators with knowledge of the lived experiences of these racialized communities

5. Use of Force/Militarization

- Restrict firearm possession to a small percentage (<5%) composed of specifically and highly trained officers
- Each municipal police force, in addition to regional RCMP detachments, are to establish a public database of use of force statistics and mandate a quarterly community review and audit of each use of force incident
- End the training, use and [abuse](#) of police K9 units
- Implement a mandatory policy for police body cameras to be worn by every municipal, provincial, and federal police member, at all times, while on duty. We recommend that the individual officers are unable to turn their cameras on and off on their own.
- Demilitarize the police. Use of tactical police units in Canada has grown by 2000% since 1980, with services increasingly used for routine activities such as executing warrants, traffic enforcement, community policing and responding to mental health crises and domestic disturbances.³ Eliminate funding for and donations of militarized equipment, such as assault rifles and Tactical Armoured Vehicles⁴, and any training or education in surveillance or military force tactics that harm community.

You each have significant influence and legal authorities at your disposal to constrain police and augment civilian oversight mechanisms. We ask you to use your authority without delay as each day passes where another life is taken, distrust of police organizations grows and communities are left torn and broken by the lack of accountability, community safety and care for its citizens.

Sincerely,

Ruby Marks

Laura Holland, Founder, Justice For Jared

³ <https://theconversation.com/rise-of-the-swat-team-routine-police-work-in-canada-is-now-militarized-90073>

⁴ <https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/06/23/Canadas-Military-Gave-2000-Assault-Rifles-To-Police/>;
<https://nationalpost.com/pmnl/news-pmnl/canada-news-pmnl/canadas-militarized-police-forces-face-defunding-and-de-tasking-experts-say>

Mara Selanders, Staff Counsel (Community), British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

Meenakshi Mannoe, Criminalization and Policing Campaigner, Pivot Legal Society

Grand Chief Steward Phillip, President, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

Chief Don Tom, Vice-President, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

CC: Brenda Lucki, Commissioner, RCMP

Dwayne McDonald, Deputy Commissioner, Commanding Officer for E Division

Ron McDonald, Chief Civilian Director, Independent Investigations Office

The Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, British Columbia

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Canada

The Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing

The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations