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For Immediate Release

Sto:lo Child Protection Action Committee Steps Up Campaign

The Chair of the Sto:lo Child Protection Action Committee, Grand Chief Ron John, says action will be taken to drive home the point that both the Ministry of Children & Family Services (MCFD) and Indian & Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) need to close the doors to the Sto:lo Nation Society's child and family services agency – Xyolhemeylh – and recognize the Fraser Salish Children & Family Services Society.

The aboriginal community in the Fraser Valley told the Action Committee s that both Xyolhemeylh and the MCFD have failed too many families and children. Xyolhemeylh is poorly managed and is subject to meddling by the Sto:lo Nation Society. A child died in care of both the the Xyolhemeylh; the Ministry oversees Xyolhemeylh. And a convicted pedophile was elected President of the Sto:lo Nation Society by its Chiefs. A man with a criminal past was chosen to lead Xyolhemeylh. He eventually stood down from the job but not before his appointment was defended by Chief Joe Hall. "Under the leadership of the Sto:lo Nation Society, Xyolhemeylh failed two evaluations in the past six years. The evaluations took place in the spring of 2000 and the winter of 2003", said Grand Chief Ron John.

The aboriginal community told the Action Committee that too much emphasis is placed on apprehending children as opposed to keeping families together. There is little in the way of support services for families. The community wants this approach changed immediately. "It's important to keep in mind that Xyolhemeylh pronounced correctly means a parent caring for a child. Incorrectly pronounced it means exactly the opposite", said Cheam elder, June Quipp.

In response to a demand from the community, the Action Committee will step up its campaign to convince the Minister of MCFD, Tom Christensen and the Minister of INAC, Jim Prentice, that Xyolhemeylh should be shut down and replaced by an accountable, effective and culturally aware agency. "Xyolhemeylh no longer has community support. More time is spent trying to protect our families and children from the agency than the agency spends helping our communities. The situation is appalling and needs to be rectified right away", said Donna Andrew of the Action Committee.

Grand Chief Ron John added that on October 18, 2006 there will be protest march through downtown Chilliwack to the courthouse. He says Xyolhemeylh uses the courts too often to break apart aboriginal families. "I think the courthouse is the best place to hold a rally to show support for our families and children and the Fraser Salish Children & Family Services Society.", said Grand Chief John.

“Following the rally, further action is planned to let both Minister Tom Christensen and Minister Jim Prentice know exactly how we feel and what we think needs to be done. We won’t stand by and let a badly run child welfare agency continue to wound our families and children. Minister Christensen is now on notice that we will shut down Xyolhemeylh. Since our families will still require support, the onus is on Minister Tom Christensen to come up with a plan to assist both our families and children before Xyolhemeylh’s doors are closed”, said Grand Chief Ron John.

For further Information, please contact either Grand Chief Ron John at: 1 604 798-2435.