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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vancouver police, Johnson family and Heiltsuk Nation should collaborate to realize the promise of systemic racism settlement: Human Rights Commissioner

Vancouver B.C. – B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, has released an interim report on the progress of an agreement between the Vancouver Police Board (VPB) and the Heiltsuk Nation to address systemic anti-Indigenous racism in policing. Commissioner Govender, whom the agreement names as an independent third-party reviewer, revealed significant shortcomings in the agreement's implementation in the report issued today. The findings underscore the need for improved relationship and collaboration between the parties involved.

The agreement between the VPB, Maxwell Johnson and his granddaughter, and the Heiltsuk Nation was struck in September 2022 to settle a human rights complaint. The complaint, filed by Johnson on behalf of himself and his granddaughter, centres on an incident in which Vancouver police handcuffed the pair outside a Bank of Montreal location in Vancouver without first speaking to them or otherwise investigating the allegation of fraud made against them. As part of the settlement agreement, the parties agreed to collaborate on a series of steps to address systemic issues in the Vancouver Police Department. B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner was tasked by all parties to the settlement with overseeing the implementation of the parts of the agreement relating to systemic reforms, including providing an interim and final review of their progress.

"The agreement reached by the Johnson family, the Heiltsuk Nation and the Vancouver Police Board to work together to address racism in policing was and is something to celebrate," said Commissioner Govender. "However, in my review, I found that the relationship between the Heiltsuk Nation and the VPB has broken down and must be repaired in order to move forward. I urge the parties to collaborate and recommit to the promise of this landmark agreement and to move forward in a way that respects Heiltsuk law."

To move the agreement forward, the Commissioner's report recommends that the Heiltsuk and VPB work together to facilitate a new Apology Ceremony that is agreeable to both parties and in accordance with Heiltsuk law. The report also calls for a meeting between the leadership of each party, along with representatives of the Johnson family, within three months.

Commissioner Govender stated: "It is my hope that this review will help the parties get their work back on track. For reform to be successful, police must ensure Heiltsuk law and perspectives are respected in both the process and results of these efforts. With less than a year remaining in this

agreement, it is crucial that the VPB and the Heiltsuk Nation refocus their efforts on rebuilding a respectful relationship, as such relationships are essential to the process of reconciliation.”

All parties had an opportunity to view and respond to draft versions of the Commissioner’s report through an extensive administrative fairness process. Parties received the final version in advance of today’s release.

Read the report: [Interim review: Settlement agreement between Maxwell Johnson Sr. and A.B. and the Vancouver Police Board](#)

Resources

- Press release: [B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner will audit the implementation of settlement agreement between Vancouver Police Board and Heiltsuk grandfather and granddaughter with critical human rights implications](#) (September 2022)
- Press release: [B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner’s Police Act submission data reveals disturbing pattern of discrimination in B.C. policing](#) (November 2021)

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Media contact

To request an interview with Commissioner Kasari Govender, please contact media@bchumanrights.ca or 604-306-7369.

Media kit

[Visit our media kit](#) for images of Commissioner Kasari Govender, pronunciation guidance, bios and more.

About BCOHRC

BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner exists to address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring. Learn more at: bchumanrights.ca

About the Commissioner

B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, started her five-year term on Sept. 3, 2019. As an independent officer of the Legislature, Commissioner Govender is uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level. Her work through BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner centres listening deeply to British Columbians to inform educational materials, policy guidance, public inquiries, interventions, community-based research and more that protects marginalized communities, addresses discrimination and injustice and upholds human rights for all.

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