

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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August 27, 2014

Honourable Steve Thomson  
PO BOX 9045  
STN PROV GOVT  
VICTORIA, BC  
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## **RE: Grace Islet Burial Grounds**

Dear Minister Thomson,

We are writing to register our utter disgust regarding the further desecration of First Nations burial grounds on Grace Islet. As previously demonstrated at cesna'əm in Musqueam territory the Province of BC is once again blatantly displaying a race-based attitude and wilful ignorance concerning the urgent need to protect First Nations burial sites.

Recent photos show clear evidence of cement foundations and walls built on top of three of the burial cairns. No charges have been laid for the violation of the permits. This is unacceptable and B.C. and your ministry in particular must take immediate action.

As Minister, you currently have the power to suspend, amend or cancel alteration permits in certain circumstances. With the Grace Islet dispute you have refused to use these powers while claiming that these grounds are technically not a cemetery under provincial law. This is especially concerning now more than ever in light of the recent Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in the Tsilhqot'in Title case. In this watershed case, the court granted the Tsilhqot'in Title to nearly one million acres of land based on use and occupation of the land prior to the establishment of Canada. Burial sites were recognized as part of the Title area. We are calling for all British Columbians to recognize that First Nation burial sites are owned by First Nations and that First Nations have duties under their own traditional laws to respect and protect their ancestors.

Furthermore, B.C. should stop stalling and work to conclude agreements with First Nations under Section 4 of the Heritage Conservation Act so First Nations can manage their sites whether these sites are on private lands or not.

Protection of First Nation burial sites at Grace Islet has increasing support from many citizens, groups and the Capital Region District. Funds are being raised to try and purchase the land. If the province would support these efforts, the conflict could be resolved at Grace Islet and provide a model for everyone working together.

It is a legal and moral imperative that provincial leaders move away from old prejudices that First Nation burial sites containing Human remains are less worthy of protection than settler cemeteries. It's time to put protection of burial sites back into the hands of the people whose ancestors have been laid to rest at these sacred sites. It's time for us all to work together to find solutions.

**On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS**



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip  
President



Chief Robert Chamberlin  
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson  
Secretary-Treasurer

CC:

First Nations Summit  
BC Assembly of First Nations  
Tsartlip First Nation  
Penelakut First Nation  
Cowichan First Nation  
Tseycum First Nation