



## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

### **The Val-d'Or Native Friendship centre profoundly troubled by the DPCP's ruling affecting Aboriginal women who were victims of sexual assault by Sûreté du Québec agents.**

**Val-d'Or, November 17, 2016** – The Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre was deeply disappointed to learn the decision of Crown prosecutors not to charge Val-d'Or police officers in regards to their alleged abuse of Aboriginal women. *“We trusted the Canadian justice system and took part with good will in this process of a police investigation of police officers. It had the results we saw today. Aboriginal women haven't fallen victim yet again to this system, which has failed to protect them. It is shameful,”* said Ms. Édith Cloutier, Director of the VDNFC. In partnership with other organizations and Aboriginal authoritative bodies, the VDNFC has devoted huge efforts to helping these women seek justice from the very beginning of the denunciations, made most notably by Radio-Canada's investigative program *Enquête*.

In light of this decision, the VDNFC, which was on the frontlines of supporting these women who had the courage and determination to file complaints against their aggressors, strongly reiterates the Government of Quebec's legal and moral obligation to institute, without further delay, an independent commission of public investigation to shed light on the events that occurred in Val-d'Or and elsewhere in Quebec. *“The denunciations of physical and sexual misconduct committed by Sûreté du Québec officers pulled back a curtain of silence around human dramas and showed that institutional violence against Aboriginal women does indeed exist in Quebec,”* says Ms. Cloutier. Moreover, a report by Esq. Fannie Lafontaine, the independent civil observer named by the Government of Quebec, mentions yesterday these *“discriminatory police practices and, more specifically, a systemic racism within the police force towards Aboriginals.”* It is obvious that now that the criminal investigations will not respond to the injustices to which women are victim the issue of the relationship between the police and Aboriginal peoples must be studied by an independent investigative commission to examine the systemic causes of violence against Aboriginal women in Val d'Or. *“This is the only way to seek the truth, to hear women and find appropriate solutions to prevent these events from reoccurring,”* says Ms. Cloutier.

Although this investigative commission was requested by most Aboriginal organizations, including the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, in the Abitibi area and elsewhere in Quebec, it was denied by the Québec Government. *“By refusing to set up an independent investigative commission, the Government of Quebec becomes complicit to these acts against Aboriginal women. The Government is responsible for its police force as its employer; it has the obligation to take action. I call to action all those who want to see justice in the name of these women,”* concluded Madame Cloutier.

Moreover, since last Monday, the Montréal-based law firm BLG, represented by the Aboriginal attorney Esq. Marie-Christine Gagnon, was tasked by Val-d'Or Aboriginal women to guide them in seeking other legal recourse. BLG has accepted to offer this support and guidance that will give the women access to the justice system and legal services through the firm's pro bono program.

A central gathering place and public forum, the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre advocates for the individual and collective rights, interests and well-being of the Aboriginal people faced with the reality of an urban environment.

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