



Contact: Roswell Cline, Sr, Nooksack Tribal Chair, rossc@nooksack-nsn.gov, 360-595-3944

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NOOKSACK INDIAN TRIBE DEMANDS A RETRACTION FROM THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER

Deming, Wa., February 4, 2022 - Today the Nooksack Indian Tribe reached out the United Nations High Commissioner demanding an immediate retraction after two UN special rapporteurs failed to contact the Nooksack Indian Tribe, accepted as fact outrageous and disproved allegations from a Seattle attorney, then released an investigation riddled with misinformation.

All sovereign nations have rules for who is a citizen, and the most common is to be descended from a citizen. You cannot simply move to another country, declare yourself a citizen, and take government housing or health care away from citizens. Whether it is Germany, the United States, or the Nooksack Indian Tribe, it is widely understood that those are benefits governments reserve for its citizens.

At the Nooksack Indian Tribe our rules for citizenship are simple: if you are descended from a Nooksack Tribal member and an Indian, you take your proof of lineage to the enrollment office and are granted citizenship. There were over 200 people – many represented by attorney Gabe Galanda - who said they were citizens, but who did not follow the rules for citizenship. They did not take proof of lineage to the enrollment office, and therefore are not citizens of Nooksack. However, that path to citizenship remains open to them under our constitution. At any time, they can take their proof of lineage to the enrollment office and become a citizen. We have over 2,000 citizens, all of whom followed the process to become a citizen; those 200+ did not.

The eight people in question – not 63 as the UN investigation stated – are not suddenly being evicted as their attorney falsely claims. This is low-income rental housing and each year every tenant must recertify. One of the rules for Nooksack housing is that the person on the lease must be a Tribal member. Between July and November 2021, notices to requalify were sent to those who failed to do so. Beginning in October, 2021, nine were sent notices of termination. One was able to qualify. Nooksack Indian Housing Authority (NIHA) is following the rules to ensure that everyone who leases low-income housing qualifies to live there, but also making sure people have time to come into compliance. This process began over six months ago.

“We have 60 Nooksack families on a waiting list for housing, and some are homeless,” said Nooksack Chairman Ross Cline Sr. “Like most governments, we don’t have extra housing for non-citizens. We have homeless people, including elders, who need a place to live and we need those

5016 Deming Road | P.O. Box 157 | Deming, WA 98244 | (360) 592-5176 | Fax: (360) 592-2125



who aren't Nooksack to move. Under the rules, they don't qualify for housing. We believe that sufficient time has passed for them to make other arrangements. I encourage them to ignore their attorney's ill-advised recommendation to fight eviction and to work to find new housing. We cannot wait forever while our people need housing."

The Nooksack Indian Tribe welcomed the full investigation ordered by the US Department of the Interior conducted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the results of that investigation are attached. The BIA states: "Nooksack Indian Housing Authority has followed its Procedures and the process for removal of individuals from tribal housing," and "we appreciate the Nooksack Tribe's cooperation in refraining from eviction actions in the last few weeks to allow the Department to proceed with its review."

Some news reports have expressed concern that the people will lose access to their culture, but those who are truly Indian are not left without a tribal cultural identity. Many of the people in question are enrolled at the Skway First Nation in British Columbia and some are even elected leaders there. Nooksack wishes them well at Skway. But we cannot grant citizenship, or the benefits of citizenship, to people who aren't descended from Nooksack ancestors. Those are the rules for citizenship in our Tribal constitution and we follow those rules.

To the two individuals at the United Nations: we never heard from you. You were misled by an attorney for eight people who want to remain in housing for which they are not qualified, and you failed to conduct even the most cursory investigation. Your statement to the United States government was riddled with inaccuracies, falsehoods and outright lies that you accepted on face value without a shred of proof. There are important issues examined by the United Nations and unfortunately this complete lack of fact-finding calls your work into question. You cannot purport to speak for marginalized or indigenous people yet try to steamroll the rights and sovereignty of an indigenous nation and our 2,000 people. Under separate cover, we have contacted the High Commissioner to demand a formal retraction.

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About the Nooksack Indian Tribe

The Nooksack Indian Tribe are a federally recognized Tribe, a party to the Point Elliott Treaty of 1855, and today are based in their ancestral homeland of Whatcom County. They are Coast Salish people who lived, fished, hunted, and gathered for untold generations in their historic traditional lands from the base of Mt. Baker to the saltwater at Bellingham Bay. They extended into Skagit County to the south, and British Columbia to the north. Their territory included a primary Nooksack area, not open to free use by members of other groups, and joint-use areas, which were shared. Today there are approximately 2,000 enrolled Tribal members and the Nooksack reservation is at the town of Deming with Tribal land extending from Lynden to the South Fork Valley.