Whapmagoostui ·ḋΛLd∽⊃Δ

Chisasibi Cらが

Wemindji ·ΔΓ° Γ̀

Eastmain À\⊐°

Waskaganish ·ຝົ່າb″∆bσ∽

Nemaska ⊸Г\b°

Waswanipi ዻኍዻ፞σ٨

Ouje-Bougoumou ⊳า>dJ

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## PRESS RELEASE

The Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) / Cree Nation Government Calls on the Government of Canada to Ensure Protection of Cree Hunting Rights – Bill C-21 (Firearms)

**Nemaska, Eeyou Istchee (December 8, 2022)** – The Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) / Cree Nation Government has been following with growing concern the political and media debate about federal Bill C-21 introducing further restrictions on firearms in Canada. This proposed legislation would, subject to certain exceptions,

- limit the transfer of handguns,
- add semi-automatic "assault-style" firearms to the list of prohibited firearms, and
- provide for "red flag" court orders to remove firearms from persons who may pose a danger to themselves or to others.

Firearms are essential tools for the Crees of Eeyou Istchee in our traditional way of life of hunting, fishing and trapping. Hunting for us is not a sport – it is central to our Cree identity and culture, based on an intimate relationship with the land and the animals. Hunting is also an essential activity in order to feed our families and our communities. We use our firearms almost daily to put food on the table; if we don't hunt, we don't eat.

It is for these reasons that we took care to protect our hunting, fishing and trapping rights in Chapter 24 of our treaty, the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA) of 1975. Our treaty is itself protected by the *Constitution of Canada* against inconsistent legislation.

Chapter 24 guarantees our treaty right to hunt, including the right to possess and use all equipment needed to exercise that right, such as hunting firearms. Certain exceptions may apply, including for certain equipment prohibited by regulations. But these regulations are to be passed upon the recommendation of the joint Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee established by Chapter 24 (Coordinating Committee).

The Crees are an Indigenous people living and occupying the vast territory of Eeyou Istchee in Northern Quebec. Our livelihood depends on the safe and responsible use of firearms. We support in principle measures to address gun violence and to strengthen the control of irresponsible firearm use in Canada. But these measures must be adapted to our treaty rights and to our traditional way of life.



∆אל תעאיירות Cree Nation Government Gouvernement de la Nation Crie

That means that these measures must be developed in close consultation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada, including the Crees of Eeyou Istchee. We enjoy special, constitutionally protected rights to hunt, and we would be most affected by changes to legislation that affect hunting firearms. Canada has an obligation under the JBNQA treaty to consult the Crees and the Coordinating Committee before enacting restrictions on firearms that may have adverse effects on our treaty rights to hunt. This consultation has to be meaningful.

The Crees have worked for many years with the Governments of Canada and Quebec to implement sound regulatory measures on firearms. We remain willing to do so. However, we must express our disappointment that neither the Cree Nation Government nor the Coordinating Committee were consulted by Canada prior to tabling Bill C-21 in Parliament in May 2022 or the extensive amendments in November 2022.

The Cree Nation Government calls upon the Government of Canada to engage with us, and with the Coordinating Committee, to assess the potential impacts of Bill C-21 on Cree treaty rights and hunting activities and to identify any necessary remedial measures, including exemptions and other appropriate mechanisms. Pending agreement on such measures, we call upon the Government of Canada to take the necessary steps to ensure that the measures proposed by Bill C-21 do not apply to the Crees of Eeyou Istchee.

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## For further information:

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