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# OPP Commissioner Hawkes Statement on Thunder Bay Issues

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**THUNDER BAY – News** – Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Commissioner, J.V.N. (Vince) HAWKES is releasing the following statement regarding the role of the OPP during investigations in other police jurisdictions:

“I want to take this opportunity to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) with regard to investigations outside of its jurisdiction and to address inferences made at a news conference in Toronto on May 31, 2017.

“The OPP conducts thorough and professional investigations for matters occurring within OPP jurisdiction and death investigations on behalf of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. The OPP is highly regarded across the country for providing investigative services to assist municipal, federal and First Nation police services at the request of that police service leader. If the OPP undertakes an investigation at the request of another police leader or on behalf of a third-party agency such as the Office of the Independent Police Review Directorate (OIPRD), the final report, is provided to the requesting agency. It would be up to that agency or its leadership to determine whether to make public the results of the report. If during the course of that investigation, criminal charges were warranted, the OPP would lay criminal charges.

“I can confirm the OPP in fact recently completed a review of the investigation relating to the death of Stacy DeBUNGEE referred to OPP by the Chief of Thunder Bay Police Service. The report has been provided to the Thunder Bay Police Service. I can also confirm that the OPP took a leadership role in the Coroner’s investigation and subsequent inquest in the death of seven Indigenous persons in Thunder Bay. The report was released in June of 2016 and included 145 recommendations. The OPP has not received a request from the Thunder Bay PS to investigate the two most recent deaths in Thunder Bay.

“As an organization, the OPP takes all information received and investigations involving possible homicide and disappearances very seriously, regardless of gender, heritage or ethnicity. The OPP does not conduct nor condone profiling that contravenes the Ontario Human Rights Code or Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Charter of Rights). The OPP does not use any law enforcement action that relies upon stereotypes related to: race; ancestry; place of origin; colour; ethnic origin; citizenship; creed; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression, age, marital status, family status, and/or disability.

“In December 2015, I personally joined with Indigenous leaders, including Ontario Regional Chief Isadore DAY, Deputy Grand Chief Denise STONEFISH and an elder, to release a Report on Missing and Unsolved Murdered Indigenous People – women and men – in OPP jurisdiction. The OPP diligently compiled and verified information in order to provide consistency and ensure clarity when the subject of missing and unsolved murdered indigenous people is discussed by stakeholders. The shared goal of the OPP Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) and Aboriginal Policing Bureau was that the report generates discussion, potential leads and/or resolution for the families and communities who have suffered loss.

“The OPP actively participates in efforts to address violence against Indigenous women, including investigating and increasing awareness in human trafficking, sexual exploitation and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Our members participated in a provincial Joint Working Group

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on Violence against Indigenous Women convened to ensure a coordinated response to Ontario's Strategic Framework to End Violence against Indigenous Women. The OPP continues to work with the RCMP and other partners on missing person investigations.

"Pro-actively, OPP members participate in and often lead a number of programs in Indigenous communities and with community leaders and other partners to provide information to guide and encourage at-risk persons to create and maintain respectful relationships and to make positive and healthy lifestyle decisions. These programs include Niigan Mosewak, Walking the Path, and Project Journey/Project Sunset – an experiential youth development program in northwestern Ontario. In fact, leaders in communities throughout Ontario have asked the OPP to implement those programs in their own community.

"The OPP also offers ongoing Indigenous Awareness Training programs to recruits and existing members to ensure we are sympathetic to community safety concerns and provide, when possible, proactive options and timely responses to calls for service.

"We cannot reverse the tragic outcomes for the families and loved ones of those murdered or missing. But the OPP will continue to support community safety and well-being wherever and whenever we can. We encourage victims to continue to come forward and report crimes and our officers will continue to offer professional support and referrals to resources within the communities we serve. Ontarians can be confident in the OPP and our ability to conduct professional investigations and bring those responsible to justice.

"I thank you for the opportunity to clarify our role and correct the record."

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