



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Statement from the Northern Yukon First Nations Chiefs on the Passing of Thomas Berger**

DAWSON CITY – “All citizens of the Northern Yukon First Nations were saddened to learn of Thomas Berger’s passing.

Mr. Berger was a unwavering champion of Indigenous issues and driven by his desire to redress injustice. From the time he first arrived in the North in the ‘70s to explore the impacts of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline on Indigenous people, he has proven himself a reliable, valiant supporter of our issues and rights. Most recently, he represented our Nations at the Supreme Court of Canada in the battle to secure proper planning in the Peel River Watershed and protect an area that was critical to our identity as a people. The Peel Land Use Planning case forever changed our relationship with other governments, upheld the significance of our Land Claim Agreements, and defended all Yukoners’ right to democratic planning processes.

He moved our world towards equality and leaves an incomparable legal legacy. He will be fondly remembered by generations of First Nations people for his efforts on our behalf. But today, we mourn the loss of a champion, ally and a very good friend.

On behalf of the citizens of our Northern Yukon First Nations, we extend our sympathies to Mr. Berger’s family and all who knew him well.

“We have lost a true legend and a friend of the Vuntut Gwitchin. Some say Mr. Berger has done more for Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples than anyone else. He’s championed land claims through the Berger Inquiry and supported the implementation of land use planning in representing our Nations in the Peel court case. The impact Mr. Berger had on the relationship between the Crown and northern Indigenous Nations is reflected in the Vuntut Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements. Our Nation thanks the Berger family for their sacrifice and will always remember Mr. Berger fondly for his time spent in Old Crow, truly listening to our people.”

– Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwitchin Government

“Thomas Berger redefined Canada’s relationship with the North. He fought every battle worth fighting, and the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in are honoured he agreed to represent our Northern Yukon First Nations in the Supreme Court of Canada. His legal expertise was admirable; his personal integrity was a great comfort. We have lost a friend. Thomas Berger and his contributions will be remembered by Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in for generations.”

– Chief Roberta Joseph, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in

“The people of Na-Cho Nyak Dun are deeply saddened by the departure of our good friend Thomas Berger. It was just over four years ago that we had the honour of witnessing his brilliance as he fought for the Peel Watershed before the Supreme Court of Canada. He seemed almost immortal. We heard our hearts and souls echo in the words that he spoke. I guess we’ll have to find a new champion to defend the Northern Tutchone Land Use Plan.

Tom changed our world in profound ways that will never be forgotten. Our deepest condolences go out to his family and to his many friends. We have lost a mountain of a man.”

– Chief Simon Mervyn, First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun