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Council
Alma Mater Society
University of British Columbia
AMS Student Nest
6133 University Blvd.
UBC Campus
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Oki Nisokowa:

I am sorry: I cannot stay silent no more, today I speak my truth.

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the Land and the people of this Territory the Muqueam, Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh.

When I left this past term of my education at UBC, I was in a very bad place. I have cried, I have gotten angry with others, I have showed disrespect to others. Worst of all I turned all those negative feeling inwards and disrespected my Mind, Body, Heart and Spirit. And going through all this while people celebrate and take credit for the work that I have done. Yes, I know I was told to let it go and carry on in life... but this is not what Social Justice is all about - you speak up and suffer whatever the consequences are. But as long as you speak up then the light will be shone on an injustice... if not then we/I are allowing actions like this to continue. Also, if something that hurts so much and is not addressed then it eats away of the person who the Creator wants you to be.

I stay silent no more with the upmost respect.... For generations, we as First Nations have been told to be silent about how we are feeling. A young person when abused in horrific ways is told not to tell anyone, or they will face more abuse. A couple of weeks ago I saw what happens, as it has happened many times before, when a young man gathered all the strength and spoke up for being abused for many years while in child care. His words "If something happens, run outside, cream rape, scream fire, let people know." Those were strong words of advice.

I have been silent for these past few months/weeks... but NO MORE.

Many of you know of the changes that I have been advocating for at UBC, the Alma Mater Society to be more precise, for the past four years. For all these years I stood alone in the AMS Council Chambers advocating for inclusion where there should have been inclusion. Through all of this it was an Elder who told me that I more than anyone should speak up about inclusion, as I had fought for so long as a person

who is First Nations/2Spirit/HIV+, so I know what it feels like "wanting to belong." It was also with the moral support of Debra Martel, then the Associate Director of the First Nations House of Learning at UBC, who always offered hours of advice, and who for an hour stood with me to comfort me when I cried in her office during my last visit with her.

If you do not know what I am talking about – two words – Indigenous Committee. I, as many of you know, was ill for most of the final months of last year, and the beginning of this year. I was sad and depressed because I was ashamed of my swollen legs and did not want anyone to see them. At one point they looked like tree stumps, not like Tina Turners, but like Groots (see even when I am hurting i laugh). I suffered in silence as usual, and I missed meetings. Traditionally missing meetings and understanding of why an Elder cannot make meetings is not questioned, as long as they inform others – that was my big mistake, again I take ownership of not keeping people informed, but depression as we all know causes people to withdraw from everyone.

Yet I did contribute to the development of the group's constitution and bylaws that showed respect to the family structure of a First Nations family... yet it was that it was too, gender based. In the Constitution I included the definitions of "First Nations, Indigenous, Inuit, Métis, Native American, and Native Alaskan, etc." The reason I put them in was to educate the elected officials of the AMS and others who work there who do not know these terms. These two documents reflected my own journey to UBC with the various boards of directors; it was my intention to even start the meetings with a prayer, yet the people around the table I did not want to bring it up. At one point during a meeting I realized that the group was acting like a non-traditional group actions I witnessed were like, decisions were made previously to the meetings by the small group that seemed to have taken the helm, I was not even asked to chair when I returned.

To this day I am still am pulling myself out of that dark place. I stood alone again even when I was in a room with others who just appeared out of the blue. I was the only one that disagreed with the AMS for putting the vote to fund the Indigenous Committee to the students. It is my belief that the funding question should have been handled by the AMS alone, as that it where the problem started. When this came up at one meeting, the students around that table did not speak up I stood alone. I knew then I that the committee table I was sitting was not the committee that I advocated for.

I also spoke up when they were negotiating the amount of the funding. With respect to those who go through all the red tape to get much needed, yet with very little funding from governments, I used the following analogy. The governments of this land treat First Nations as puppies who are made to jump through hoops and at the end, are given the treat – the treat being little funding or support to solve major problems that did not start with them. It was mentioned after the meeting that my view was "personal". Yes it was and you see it every day on the news when places like Grassy Narrows exist. I have seen government officials go through each piece of paper and make sure that every 'i' is dotted, every t is crossed. BUT there is a time when you say enough is enough. Again, I believe that the money the Indigenous Committee received should have been higher that what the committee agreed on... much MUCH higher, but again I was alone this point. After 152 years of exclusion, come on, only \$25,000. This amount is as disrespectful as that awarded to a First Nation's child that has been abused for years in care.

The main reason why I did what I did these past few years, is to have seats on the AMS, Senate and Board of Governors for a male, female and, as a young lady said at the first meeting two years ago, a Two Spirit. Her words I still hear to this day clearly when I asked why we would not have gotten here if I

had not spoken up. To this day I am still the only one standing in that room with no support from others. And you know people like Max Holmes, say that they will do as the Indigenous Committee wants. The Indigenous committee wants to be structured like Simon Fraser University's, separate from the AMS, which then takes away the voices and all the work that I have been doing these past few years.

Going up against these students who do not play well with others is something that I am use to. I have mentioned/quoted in the Council Chambers a scene from the science fiction episode "Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country." When Chancellor Gorkan is leaving the Enterprise he tells Captain Kirk "If there is to be a brave new world, our generation is going to have the hardest time living in it." This is true because you see it on the news daily, and all one can is pray and hope for peaceful and creative change, both on and off Campus.

I feel, personally, that First Nations do not want to take over or to be treated as special but we want to be treated as equals. We do not want to take over all the seats at the table but to be welcomed to the table as sisters and brothers. But what transpired at the beginning of the year was not that. The Indigenous Committee was to have an elected representative in the AMS election this past year, to have a seat at the table. The Committee room was to be for everyone who wanted a place to study or relax, no matter their race. It was supposed to be a place where we would share who we are as First Nations, Inuit and Métis. To have it as an exclusive place is not what sharing is all about, it is not what First Nations is.

The previous four years I researched in my own way. I introduced myself to First Nation, Inuit and Métis Students. I sat with them and got to know them and they shared their stories of their education with me. I also had a town hall, thanks to Rueben, Mitchell, Debra and Linc for your help. It was at this Town Hall where recommendations for change were developed. Yet all this work was not recognized by the elected officials who ran the AMS who in turn during last year's election held their own Town Hall. The three people who held the Town Hall were the same three people who were elected as President, Vice President External and VP Academic. You see, they tried do what I had been doing the previous years and took credit for it. Wow, and they say that a university is a place of ethics.

The night when the election results were announced at the Pit, again I stood alone. And I knew I was going to lose as I was up against a system and an Election Officer who looked and treated me with total disrespect. I brought my concerns to the Ombudsperson and was told I had a Human Rights complaint against them. I thought about it and then I looked at her and said no, it is not worth all the time and effort as they are rich and they are one, I am one and I am poor. I did win my last Human Rights complaint, but did not want to go through all this again. Leading up to the election I really thought that I was doing and saying the right things, and hoped that one person would come out and support me, but no, I was alone.

When this school year started, the work began on the Indigenous Committee. Some of you may get this feeling of not being wanted at meetings, or that you are heard but really listened too. I think that First Nations leaders feel the same when they are discussing language, culture, self-determination and traditional lands with some federally- or provincially-elected officials. Or when you sit at the table and you ask a question and you hear your answer given by one person with the strength of the group.

I did not have the fight left in me, as I was sad because I was fighting people of my own race.... That is what hurt most. To this day not one of those people on that Committee have contacted me to see if I

am alright or how I am. Not one person has written to or called me these past few months. Not one person stands with me in the AMS Council still advocating for seats on the three levels.

One of the most disrespectful issues that came up was the payment to the Elder who I asked to come and help to get this Committee started. The Indigenous Committee actually negotiated with the AMS on how much to pay the Elder, I could not believe this when I heard this. But even more disrespectful is that it took the AMS/UBC months to pay an Elder. As a Piikani Niitsitapi, I was brought up to respect our Elders and treat them with the utmost respect. The committee treated two Elders with the utmost disrespect, the other Elder being me – they were half my age so it makes me their Elder does it not? Yet no apology has been given to me, and a cold letter was written to the Elder stating “we do not need your services anymore.” If my father were alive, I would have been yelled at for doing that.

The past few weeks I have been reacquainting/reminding myself why I want to stay at UBC: for the simple fact I still do want to contribute to the advancement of who we are as a people and to get to that place where we are one. Yes, I know there are some within the AMS who see me as angry or hard to work with — to them I say go live on a reserve for a few years, spend a few weeks in a homeless shelter, question your very being by living in the Downtown Eastside, live with the stigma and discrimination that comes with HIV for 26 years, doubt yourself for years as to why you are HepC, try to understand why people laugh at you on and off campus, fight to have your voice heard everyday ... only then will you will see what I am the way I am — and you will see the true me. The person that loves life and everything around. A person who will fight for others. I thought that as First Nations, Inuit and Métis the members of the Indigenous Committee would understand ... I was wrong.

There is also the matter of Events that I had planned for the Committee. They were events that I had scheduled for the school year 2019-2020. I feel that since I submitted them with the intention of assisting in the organizing I feel that under the circumstances they are my intellectual property. As a Positive from all of this and months of praying and thinking I will be submitting an application for a new Club within the AMS. The application for clubs has a request for information of events that will be planned. I have made sure looking at through an inclusive lens, with First Nations/Inuit/Metis/Student body, that the events I suggested would fit into the new clubs mandate.

I know that we as First Nations are to be humble, but do we stay humble and not question or speak up when actions of our own making and of others eat away at us, or do we speak up? I have chosen the latter.

Whatever the future may hold I hope and pray that before the year begins there are those three seats on the AMS. A good place to start. The Senate and Board of Governors will come. But until that time it feels good to let this go. I went for a long walk last night at 3 am. I saw a star and I waved at it, I thought it followed me and watched over me. I believe it was my father watching over me.

ADDENDUM:

This letter was written on Thursday of last week, this morning June 3, at a Closing Ceremony in Gatineau, Quebec the Final Report of Murdered and Missing Women and Girls was released. In her speech the Chief Commissioner of the Inquiry spoke these words...

1. There must be Substantive Equality, now substantive equality means achievement of truth, equality and outcome;

2. Indigenous Women and Girls, 2SLGBTQ+ are holders of Inherent Indigenous rights, Constitutional Rights, and International and Domestic Human Rights;
3. Issues must be reframed from 'unfilled needs' to the Denial of their basic rights;
4. Implementation must also use a Decolonizing approach that recognize these inherent rights;
5. Implementation must use a strength based approach, focusing on the resilience and expertise of Individuals and communities;
6. At all stages of Implementation at all stages families and survivors must be included - Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ+ must always be at the table.

As you can see the advocacy that I have been doing regarding the need for change in order to open the doors to UBC so that more First Nations, Inuit and Metis students can be a part of UBC's future. To ensure that First Nations', Inuit and Metis Women, Males and 2Spirits are represented on AMS Council, UBC Senate and Board of Governors.

If you would like to meet to discuss this letter I would be more than happy to meet with you. So on this beautiful morning June 3rd, I wish that you have a great week, and I look forward to your response or request for a face-to-face meeting.

All my relations

Kitaitamatsin or Until We Meet Again...

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"Our Spirits speak Blackfoot, because the Blackfoot Language is a Spirit... before the new talk came... the old people called sweat songs earth songs... the wind the blizzard the thunder the rain... we sang their songs... the water running... the trees blowing in the wind... a real person can hear them talking... this what we are... our teachers are the earth... speaking their language."

CC: Santa Ono, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of British Columbia
Indigenous Committee, University of British Columbia
Chris Hakim, President of Alma Mater Society
Senate Members, University of British Columbia
Dr. Margaret Moss, Director First Nations House of Learning
First Nations and Indigenous Studies, Vancouver Campus
Chief Wayne Sparrow, Musqueam Nation
Hon. Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training
The Talon