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**CHEROKEE NATION®**

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November 22, 2024

Department of the Interior  
Office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs  
1849 C Street, N.W. MS-4660-MIB  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Assistant Secretary Newland,

As leaders of the Cherokee Nation, we are writing regarding an urgent public safety matter on the Cherokee Nation Reservation that, if left unaddressed, could adversely affect federal, tribal, and state relationships and the lives of all residents of our Reservation.

We bring your attention to the attached letter from 32 local law enforcement officials throughout the Cherokee Nation's 7,000 square-mile reservation. The letter outlines the clear and present danger of an unaccountable and unauthorized fake police force, organized by the United Keetoowah Band ("UKB") and operating on the Cherokee Nation Reservation. The letter underscores how UKB's law enforcement actions are active threats to public safety and the rule of law.

As a result of the UKB Lighthorse's intervention, a recent DUI arrest in Tahlequah was dismissed due to the lack of legal jurisdiction of the UKB Lighthorse, which made the initial stop of the vehicle. This instance, among others, demonstrates the confusion that the UKB Lighthorse is causing and illustrates how potential criminals could be put back on the streets due to the UKB's activities.

As the Principal Chief of Cherokee Nation and the Attorney General—Cherokee Nation's chief law enforcement officer—we are deeply concerned about the threat this fake police force poses to our citizens and neighbors. We are heartened by the seriousness and professionalism with which our law enforcement partners across 32 local agencies have come together to renounce this fake police force and protect public safety. This strong coalition represents adherence to the rule of law, as well as a respect for tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the U.S. We know you share these priorities as well. That's why we write to you to underscore the threat coming from the UKB, which seeks to re-write laws, court decisions, and history through a campaign of falsehoods.

In short, UKB falsely claims to be the “real” Cherokee Nation, or a “successor” to the “historic” Cherokee Nation, and that as such, it has governmental authority and jurisdiction on the Reservation. To make these false claims, the UKB also falsely claim that a “historic” Cherokee Nation was at some point disestablished. The facts and law do not support UKB’s false narrative. The UKB is not the Cherokee Nation nor a “successor” to some prior or “historic” Cherokee Nation that no longer exists. The Cherokee Nation has continued to exist since before the United States was even founded.

The UKB is a federally recognized Indian tribe headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, within the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation Reservation, but entirely separate from the Cherokee Nation. The UKB did not exist until the 1950s, after Congress granted them federal recognition nearly 100 years after the last treaty between the U.S. and the Cherokee Nation was signed. Those treaties reserved to the Cherokee Nation—and to the Cherokee Nation alone—sovereign authority and exclusive tribal jurisdiction over its 7,000 square-mile Reservation.

But when Congress granted the UKB recognition, it did not create any reservation for the UKB, nor did it grant it any rights secured by - or interest in - the treaties with the Cherokee Nation. Since its creation, the UKB has maintained a separate tribal government from the Cherokee Nation. Its brief history, legal rights, and sovereign powers are all separate and distinct from that of the Cherokee Nation. Congress has never given any other tribe jurisdiction on the Cherokee Nation Reservation.

There is no need to take our word for it; you must merely look at federal law: “The Cherokee Nation, a federally recognized Indian tribe with its present tribal headquarters south of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, having adopted its most recent constitution on June 26, 1976, and having entered into various treaties with the United States, including but not limited to the Treaty at Hopewell, executed on November 28, 1785 (7 Stat. 18), and the Treaty at Washington, D.C., executed on July 19, 1866 (14 Stat. 799), has maintained a continuous government-to-government relationship with the United States since the earliest years of the Union.” Public Law 107-331 (emphasis added).

As Congress has already recognized, the treaties establishing the Cherokee Nation Reservation were made by the United States with the Cherokee Nation and with the Cherokee Nation alone, not with the UKB. And the Cherokee Nation, as the treaty tribe, has had a continuous, uninterrupted and ongoing government-to-government relationship with the United States from the time of those treaties to the present. The Cherokee Nation today is the same Cherokee Nation that signed those treaties, and as such it holds exclusive rights under those treaties which are not shared with the UKB, which was created nearly 100 years after the treaties were signed.

And yet, the UKB persists in endangering public safety on the Cherokee Nation Reservation by using a false narrative to arrogate to itself the sovereign authority to assert law enforcement jurisdiction throughout the Reservation—jurisdiction it does not possess either as a matter of treaty or other law. Unauthorized UKB members have begun posing as law enforcement agents

across the Cherokee Nation Reservation, inserting themselves into criminal investigations in clear violation of the law. These unlawful actions create confusion among our citizens and threaten legitimate law enforcement activities.

As we work to settle this matter of public safety in accordance with the law and our law enforcement partners, we hope that you approach all matters of federal-tribal relations with a full realization of what is going on here. The UKB is seeking to rewrite history. They have spun a false narrative, and now rely on ignorance or inaction from federal officials as they actively undermine the Cherokee Nation's tribal sovereignty. We humbly ask that you stand with history, the truth, and the rule of law to protect our sovereignty, maintain the rights we have established through our long, unbroken history with the U.S. government and protect public safety in the Cherokee Reservation.

In the meantime, we will continue to offer to work constructively with the UKB within the law and to provide services to their people because our interests are the same as yours: To create a future that allows for all tribal citizens to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you require further information or have follow up questions, please contact our Cherokee Nation Delegate to Congress, Kimberly Teehee at [kim-teehee@cherokee.org](mailto:kim-teehee@cherokee.org) or 202-615-9505.

Sincerely,



Chuck Hoskin, Jr.  
Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation



Chad Harsha  
Cherokee Nation Attorney General

CC: Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland  
Solicitor Robert Anderson