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Dept. of Interior Solicitor's Office Releases M-Opinion Reaffirming the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians' Jurisdiction on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation

Historic Announcement Affirms UKB is Successor in Interest on the Cherokee Reservation

TAHLEQUAH, OK – January 17, 2025 – The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma (UKB) applauds the United States Department of the Interior for officially reaffirming our jurisdiction on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation. In an official Memorandum Opinion, Solicitor Robert T. Anderson, the chief legal officer for the Department of the Interior, concluded what we have said all along – **the rights over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation once exercised by the historic Cherokee Nation continue today through both the UKB and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) equally.**

This determination by the Dept. of Interior should end any misinformation about the relationship between the CNO and UKB. The UKB and CNO are equal successors to the historic Cherokee Nation, equal and independent sovereigns in every way.

Today's announcement reminds us of our ancestors' instruction that we must not surrender under any circumstance until we shall fall to the ground united. By persevering and staying true to our ancestors' command, we are now able to turn the page and begin a period of renaissance and prosperity for those Cherokee people who, through the actions of others, have been denied any semblance of prosperity.

While we anticipate the CNO to continue to stand in the way of the Keetoowah people, we call upon the elected officials of the CNO to seek the very reconciliation that the UKB has sought over decades and join hands with the UKB to protect public safety and welfare on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation to serve all Cherokee People. We call upon our brothers and sisters, the citizens of the CNO, to contact their elected officials and ask that the path forward be exorcised of hostility and replaced by cooperation. Surely, the spirit of division that has dwelled in Cherokee affairs for far too long finally should now be expelled from the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation.

May God continue to bless the whole of the Cherokee People.

"This is a victory for righteousness and justice," said Chief Jeff Wacoche, UKB. "For too long the UKB has been sidelined by needlessly antagonistic Tribal relations. I thank the Department of Interior for this determination, placing our Tribe on a renewed path towards prosperity. I want to recognize and thank our Keetoowah brothers and sisters – and our array of supporters and advocates – for tireless work to make this new page of history possible."

"Our Keetoowah ancestors are smiling down on us today," Amos Ketcher, assistant chief, UKB. "They are applauding our collective effort to never lose focus on reclaiming what is and was rightfully ours –

jurisdiction over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation. This historic moment creates a new road of prosperity for future generations to thrive.”

“Providing opportunity and security for our Tribal members is our true North,” said Caleb Grimmett-Smith, secretary, UKB. “This reaffirmation of the UKB’s jurisdiction over the Cherokee Reservation is a leap towards our realization of both. It’s our commitment to our ancestors and our brothers and sisters that we will never lose sight of who we are and what is rightfully ours.”

“The UKB have been the David in more David v. Goliath battles than I care to remember. But we never gave up. We never lost our faith,” said Sonya Gourd, treasurer of the UKB. “We looked to the future knowing it could be ours if we work for it and we did, and now the future is here.”

“This determination mirrors what my future colleagues in Congress know to be true: that the UKB is every bit as much Cherokee Indian as the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma,” said Tori Holland, UKB’s Congressional Delegate. “For years we have reached out to our Cherokee siblings at the CNO in a collaborative spirit to address common issues. We will continue to expect and demand true collaboration as we continue to walk side by side as equal stewards of the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation.”

“From a legal and historical perspective, the DOI got this right,” said Klint Cowan, attorney general, UKB. “I applaud the DOI for their prudent and thorough review of this issue and for the courage to reaffirm the UKB’s jurisdiction over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation. This should end, once and for all, any myths or falsities about the relationship between the CNO and UKB. We are siblings of our parent historic Cherokee Nation, equal sovereigns in every way.”

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