



NEWS RELEASE

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First Nations Summit welcomes Senate Standing Committee report on BC treaty negotiations, encourages Canada to take urgent action to implement recommendations

Coast Salish Territory/ Vancouver, BC – The First Nations Summit welcomes the just released Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples report on BC treaty negotiations. The report is entitled *"A Commitment Worth Preserving: Reviving the British Columbia Treaty Process"*.

"We are happy that the Committee recognized that the settlement of the BC land question is an issue of importance to all British Columbians, and indeed to all Canadians," said Dan Smith, a member of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. "The Committee noted that 'the conclusion of treaties provides important benefits both within and outside First Nations, including a solid legal basis for future economic development', which is an important notion for all to consider".

The First Nations Summit is calling on the federal government to heed the Committee's observations and recommendations which outline how a renewed commitment by the parties to engage in open, good faith and efficient treaty negotiations is essential to the effective functioning of the BC treaty process.

The Committee urged the federal government to give immediate consideration to the following issues, and, where appropriate, develop timely responses and action plans to address these issues:

- *That federal decision-making processes and negotiation mandates be revised to accord federal negotiators sufficient flexibility and authority to engage in open, genuine and interest-based negotiations with First Nations.*
- *That the federal government work closely with the Government of B.C. and the First Nations Summit to determine what First Nations need to resolve overlapping claims within the B.C. treaty process and to determine each party's responsibility in this regard.*
- *That adequate resources be available to the BCTC to provide or appoint dispute resolution services to assist First Nations in the resolution of overlapping claims within the B.C. treaty process.*

The Committee also acknowledged the significance of the recent Report on Treaty Negotiations in BC, by Jim Lornie, Special Representative to Minister Duncan on the BC Treaty Process. The Committee notes the Lornie report, which was released

publicly in May 2012, "and its recommendations may well assist the Principals and the BCTC in renewing their commitment to the process."

"It's time for the federal government to take responsibility for the slow pace of treaty negotiations. The federal government must shift its focus from their unilateral take-it-or-leave-it negotiation mandates, to recognizing that Canada needs to change its approach to treaty negotiations in key areas to respond to First Nations' legitimate concerns such as those identified in both the Senate Committee report as well as the Lornie Report", said Grand Chief Edward John, also of the First Nations Summit Political Executive.

"First Nations engaged in negotiations have long wanted nothing more than to reach timely, just and equitable agreements with Canada and BC to better allow us to have healthy, sustainable and prosperous communities. First Nations will continue to work towards treaties which recognize and implement Aboriginal Title and Rights in First Nations' territories," he added.

In January of this year at the Crown-First Nations Gathering held in Ottawa, Prime Minister Stephen Harper committed to ensure that "federal negotiation policies reflect the principles of recognition and affirmation ... and advance certainty expeditious resolution and self-sufficiency." The First Nations Summit believes that the only way the Prime Minister can live up to this commitment is to fully embrace and immediately take steps to implement the Senate Committee report as well as the Lornie report.

The First Nations Summit executive will be examining the Committee's report in detail and will work with the Principals to ensure implementation of the recommendations.

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Note: A copy of the full report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples can be downloaded at www.fns.bc.ca

The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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