



# FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### ***Treaty Negotiations must be a priority for Canada and BC: First Nations Summit comments on BCTC 2013 Annual Report***

***Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver*** – First Nations Summit (FNS) leaders were in Victoria today for the release of the 2013 BC Treaty Commission (BCTC) Annual Report.

In the report, the BCTC expresses concerns regarding both Canada's and BC's commitment to negotiations and implementation of treaty agreements. In particular, they express concern about: the readiness and capacity of Canada and BC to meet the requirements of a number of tables simultaneously going into final agreement and implementation stages of the negotiations process, as well as concern about BC's movement away from long term solutions achievable through the negotiation of treaty agreements in favour of short term economic opportunities such as bilateral Interim Treaty Agreements (ITA's).

"First Nations currently engaged in negotiations have always been committed to advancing the good faith negotiation of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements. However, we share the BCTC's concern that while bilateral agreements and other such constructive arrangements are valuable steps towards self-sufficiency, we must be mindful and careful not to view these opportunities as a replacement for the benefits that a final treaty agreement can bring", said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit political executive.

The BCTC Report identifies various capacity issues that continue to plague First Nations, including the capacity to negotiate and implement treaty agreements and the ability for First Nations to reach agreements with their neighbours on overlap and shared territory issues.

"The FNS supports the BCTC's recommendation of increasing the focus on First Nations capacity issues, including the recommendation for increased funding for implementation", added FNS political executive member Robert Phillips. "The resolution of overlaps and shared territory issues also continues to be a critical issue. However in order to reach successful resolution of these issues, the federal and provincial governments must provide First Nations with the necessary resourcing".

The BCTC report goes on to suggest that the Principals (Canada, BC, FNS) need to collectively find solutions to key negotiation barriers such as the lack of government mandates in key areas such as fisheries and fiscal relations, overlap disputes and rising negotiation debt. In its report, the BCTC also suggests that the federal and provincial governments need to refrain from carrying out any more "studies" relating to these negotiation challenges and actually move toward actively implementing solutions.

"We agree the time has come for all parties, in particular BC and Canada, to get on with the task at hand and refrain from any further studies and demonstrate the political will to build relationships with First Nations based on mutual recognition and respect, aimed at achieving reconciliation", said Grand Chief Edward John, also of the FNS political executive.

"We also echo the concern expressed regarding the governments use of templates for negotiations. While precedents are a starting point, it is imperative that governments avoid boxing themselves in through a one size fits all approach", added Chief John. "The time has come for action to move beyond dialogue on the challenges to active negotiation of issues, solutions and the implementation of agreed upon concrete commitments to overcome these barriers".

The FNS will continue to engage with BC and Canada to underscore that treaty negotiations in BC must continue to be a "made in BC" process to reflect the unique requirements and interests of First Nations in this province; that BC and Canada must live up to the original commitments set out in the BC Claims Task Force Report; and that good faith negotiations remain the most effective way to resolve the outstanding BC land question and support First Nations governance and self-sufficiency.

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*The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. Further background information on the Summit may be found at [www.fns.bc.ca](http://www.fns.bc.ca).*

For Further Information:

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