



# FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **On 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Treaty Negotiations in BC; First Nations Summit leaders call for renewed commitment from governments**

**Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC)** – The signing of the BC Treaty Commission Agreement, 20 years ago today, marked a significant moment in the history of the relationship between the Crown and First Nations in BC. This agreement, signed by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of BC and the leaders of the First Nations Summit, was celebrated by a sacred Coast Salish cultural ceremony, which honored the parties' commitments to move beyond their difficult past and build a new relationship based on mutual trust, respect and understanding. Unfortunately, negotiations have been far too slow, far too costly and have not met these commitments.

The failure of the Crown to recognize the reality of Aboriginal title in the early years of the history of British Columbia created the outstanding Indian land question that largely remains unresolved. In the early 1990s, BC and Canada finally decided to work with First Nations to address this critical issue and established a modern, made in BC, treaty process to achieve the reconciliation required by law and justice.

“While treaty negotiations have resulted in some success stories, we would have clearly hoped there would have been many more by now. Unfortunately, some 20 years after the start, many First Nations remain frustrated by the growing debt and slow pace of the current treaty negotiation process”, said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit political executive.

“Over the past 20 years, both First Nations and the courts have repeatedly advanced the themes of **reconciliation, good faith, accommodation, compensation, respect and recognition**. These **must** be the cornerstones as Canada, BC and First Nations continue to work together to find fair, equitable and workable solutions to strengthen the current negotiations process. The time has come for the federal and provincial governments to take responsibility for the slow pace of treaty negotiations. Both governments must shift their focus from their unilateral take-it-or-leave-it negotiation mandates, to recognizing a need to change their collective approach to treaty negotiations”, added Chief John.

First Nations Summit leaders are also encouraging Canada to heed recommendations contained in the June 2012 Standing Senate Committee Report, in particular a recommendation for “the federal decision making processes and mandates be revised to accord the federal negotiators sufficient flexibility and authority to engage in open, genuine and interest based negotiations with First Nations”. This recommendation highlights narrow defined negotiation mandates that emphasize a positional take-it-or-leave-it approach to negotiations which clearly compromise the fairness and efficiency of the treaty negotiation process.

Concerns regarding the current state of negotiations are largely echoed by Chief Doug White of the First Nations Summit political executive, "We find ourselves at crossroads where all of us - First Nations and the Crown - must confront the reality of the future paths open to us. One path - the path we have been on - is one where we are trying to forge treaties of reconciliation without bringing all of the tools, understandings, authorities, and vision needed to achieve such an outcome. That path is not sustainable. I fear it will only lead us to greater conflict, deepen the sense of injustice, and erode trust. The other path is the one that accepts from the outset that whatever the future may hold, it is one that First Nations and the Crown must forge together.

"History has led us to a point where the destinies of First Nations and the Crown are intertwined and interrelated in all ways. It is from that vantage point of recognizing our future is inevitably a shared one, and that treaties must express that, that we will be motivated to bring all our tools and efforts to the table and build the patterns of reconciled relationships for the future", added Chief White.

"Further, Canada and British Columbia must abandon and renounce their colonial policies to seek certainty through the extinguishment or surrender of Aboriginal title and rights. As Chief Joe Mathias said 20 years ago today; *"the negotiations, in our view, will not be based on that tired old notion of extinguishment. **We will not tolerate the extinguishment of our collective aboriginal rights!** Let us be clear about that today"*, added Chief White.

"First Nations engaged in negotiations have found it particularly concerning that as we approach the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Canada announced its intention to shift its focus and negotiation resources on tables that it deems have the greatest potential. This is yet another intolerable indicator that the federal government has become overly concerned in recent years with how it can disengage from negotiation tables", pointed out Dan Smith, also of the Summit's political executive.

First Nations engaged in treaty negotiations remain committed and still believe that treaties are the best way to resolve the long standing land question in BC and to achieve reconciliation of the Crown's assertion of sovereignty with our pre-existing sovereignty. We must all work towards concluding treaties that recognize and respect First Nations' ability to make the decisions that affect our lives, lands, resources and territories.

One generation has passed since the treaty negotiations process began in BC. It is urgent that all parties take deliberate and immediate action to overcome the difficult barriers that lie before us so that all First Nations in BC that wish to, can achieve reconciliation through the meaningful implementation of their Aboriginal title and rights through treaties.

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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](http://www.fns.bc.ca).

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