



FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

NEWS RELEASE

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
FEBRUARY 11, 2003*

First Nations Summit Statement on today's Speech from the Throne

North Vancouver, BC — The leadership of the First Nations Summit issued the following statement on today's Speech from the Throne.

Recognition and reconciliation of Aboriginal/treaty rights are critical to improve First Nations and Crown relations. The government needs to act now, not later.

We have and will work with this government (and the federal government) to improve the social, economic and political circumstances of our people. We know that reconciliation is not an event – it is reflected in the actions and decisions of government. We have been around too many governments simply to take them at their word. We look forward to seeing this government acting on their word. Actions will speak louder than words.

The government announced its deep regrets for mistakes of past provincial governments. We will not change history but we can shape a different future. The regrets voiced by the government will now be before our people for their consideration.

The intention of the provincial government, reflected in the Speech from the Throne, is a step in the right direction for renewing and improving First Nations – Crown relations. It is true, years of paternalism has fostered inequity, intolerance, isolation and indifference. The "hallmarks of despair" referenced in the speech are real and the day to day impacts in our communities and among our people are real.

The history of denial of our rights and marginalization in our lands cannot be erased by a statement of regret. But government, in true partnership with First Nations can shape a renewed First Nation – Crown relationship. This will take time and patience and the development of trust. We have too often seen good intentions betrayed by indifference, lack of action or action that is contrary to the stated intention of reconciliation.

History will repeat itself if we do not learn from past mistakes. Governments in the past denied the land rights of our people. Governments now and in the future must recognize the existence and legitimacy of Aboriginal title, treaty and Aboriginal rights, including our inherent right to self government. The courts have ruled both industry and governments have legal duties and obligations to consult and accommodate First Nations and our constitutionally recognized Aboriginal rights and treaty rights.

The Province requires certainty to move ahead with its economic agenda. Our First Nations can provide that certainty. Governments and industry will not get the certainty they need without good faith negotiations, and fair and equitable agreements with our First Nations.

The natural resources opportunities and economic funds announced by governments have many strings attached. We will examine these carefully and make our decisions in due course.

The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in the treaty negotiation process in British Columbia. Background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

-30-

For further information contact:
Colin Braker, Communications Coordinator
FNS: Office: (604) 990-9939 or Cell: (604) 328-4094