

First Nations Summit

NEWS RELEASE

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June 21 National Aboriginal Day: Repatriation of Indigenous cultural treasures

Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, British Columbia – For far too long, governments and Canadians have been completely indifferent to the situation of Indigenous peoples. But, when it comes to the public images of BC and Canada internationally, governments have no hesitation in showing and relying on images reflecting the vastness and depth of Indigenous cultures. Nonetheless, where it has been appropriate, Indigenous peoples have been proud to share their songs, stories, ceremonial regalia, images, and their many varied cultural treasures.

"In the past, many Indigenous "cultural objects", which we call treasures, were wrongfully taken, and, in many cases, stolen from Indigenous owners, families and communities. These treasures, including the sacred remains of our ancestors, must be returned. We welcome the Premier's commitment to this process of repatriation," said Grand Chief Edward John on behalf of the First Nations Summit.

Repatriation plans must be developed with the full and active participation of Indigenous peoples. Where there are obstacles preventing repatriation, legislative or administrative actions must be taken on a priority basis to provide remedies to ensure the expeditious return of the cultural treasures.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides a constructive framework for this repatriation process. Article 12 of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples confirms:

- 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.*
- 2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.*

The First Nations Summit is committed to working with all levels of government to actively assist in repatriating cultural artifacts that rightfully belong to BC First Nations.

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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.

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