



FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

NEWS RELEASE

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First Nations' inherent right of self-government exists declare the First Nations Summit

Vancouver – Aboriginal groups throughout the province will be consulting over the next few weeks to determine whether new instructions to provincial treaty negotiators released today by the Attorney General are consistent with the 1991 negotiation process agreed upon by the governments of Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Summit.

First Nations remain committed to a process of good faith negotiations to fairly resolve the land question in BC and will continue to insist that the governments demonstrate the same commitment.

It took aboriginal people 120 years to get the BC Government to agree to negotiate treaties. In 1991, there was finally tripartite agreement to establish the BC treaty process when all three parties agreed to the 1991 BC Claims Task Force Report and the 1992 British Columbia Treaty Commission Agreement.

“The inherent right to self government for First Nations exists. It is recognized and affirmed in S-35 of the Constitution. Neither the provincial government nor the referendum will change this,” said Grand Chief Ed John of the First Nations Summit Task Group.

The First Nations Summit Task Group will conduct this review over the ensuing weeks in consultation with First Nations.

“It is time for British Columbia and Canada to engage in good faith negotiations on governance based on the inherent right of self-government,” said Satsan (Herb George) of the First Nations Summit Task Group.

“The recognition of First Nations governments, with clearly defined jurisdiction in key areas, is absolutely essential,” Satsan noted.

The Supreme Court of Canada in the *Delgamuukw* case confirmed that First Nations in British Columbia have existing aboriginal title. This is a legal interest in land and a right to the land itself and is on an equal legal footing with Crown title.

“The treaty process must fully recognize and implement this important decision recognizing the pre-existence of aboriginal title,” said Grand Chief Edward John. “This recognition is fundamental to not only to our constitutional rights, but also to our children’s future and this province’s future.”

“A referendum cannot extinguish Aboriginal title or rights any more than it can extinguish First Nations’ inherent right of self-government,” said Lydia Hwitsum of the First Nations Summit Task Group. “Two-thirds of British Columbians chose not to vote in the BC government referendum, clearly showing that most citizens viewed the referendum as an ill-conceived and flawed process. Regardless of the results, they do not represent the views of the majority of people in the province.”

The Summit calls on British Columbia and Canada to publicly renounce and abandon their policies of seeking certainty through the extinguishment or surrender of aboriginal title and rights.

The First Nations Summit Chiefs will meet with the Premier Gordon Campbell and his cabinet on September 16, 2002.

Premier Campbell, Attorney General Geoff Plant and federal minister Robert Nault have each been invited to attend the September Summit meeting on September 17th – 19th in Port Alberni, BC.

These meetings will afford an opportunity for the parties to discuss the implications of the referendum and BC’s new negotiating instructions to the process and the substantive issues being negotiated.

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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.

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