

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

November 29, 2021

FNLC Calls for Accelerated Implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* on 2-year Anniversary

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) Today, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) acknowledges the two-year anniversary since British Columbia became the first province in Canada and one of the first jurisdictions in the world to enshrine the human rights of Indigenous peoples in law. Bill 41, the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (Declaration Act), was passed unanimously on November 26, 2019 and became law on November 28.

This landmark legislation was a result of the collective efforts of Indigenous peoples across the province to advance the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The journey from Bill 41 to the Declaration Act, although long and full of challenges, saw unprecedented collaboration between the Province and First Nations and renewed vigor from the provincial government to positively advance the First Nations-Crown relationship.

This momentum has not yet carried forward into systemic change. There has been progress, including most recently amendments to the *Interpretation Act*. Certainly, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and recurring climate change emergencies such as flooding, and wildfires have significantly impacted effective implementation of the Declaration Act. At the same time, it is the disproportionate negative impacts of these events on First Nations governments and citizens that further reinforces the need for Indigenous co-development of provincial policy and legislation, and shared decision-making arrangements between Indigenous Governing Bodies and the provincial government.

Ultimately, on this two-year anniversary, the Province has yet to transform legislative processes to ensure new and existing laws are consistent with the UN Declaration, has not substantially and equitably advanced shared decision-making agreements with title and rights holders, and has not concluded an action plan – all obligations under its own law.

As we move forward into a new year, the FNLC remains committed both to working with the Province on these priorities and holding them accountable to its commitments under the Declaration Act.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “While we may have fond warm fuzzy memories of our history-making achievement with the adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the good feelings, momentum, and excuses have worn thin. Our leaders, Elders, and citizens can no longer be asked to be patient about matters relating to their fundamental human rights. It continues to be Groundhog Day with the Province unilaterally developing and advancing policy and legislation and creating an engagement



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

record for the purposes of referencing later as cover- for example the current Bill 22 regarding FOIPPA, the political soufflé of old growth deferral proposals, and the problematic Children and Youth with Special Needs framework. It's well past time to empower title and rights holders to make decisions about their own peoples and within their own territories – this must be the core of our focus on Declaration Act implementation over the coming year.”

“We know that changing the machinery of government takes time and that it has been two years since the passage of the Declaration Act. Yet, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the flooding and wildfires across the province shows that, where there is political will, progress and action can happen quickly. It is time to apply this same level of political will to meaningfully tackle the issue of legislative development, ensuring a rightful place for First Nations Governments throughout the process. We look forward to working with the Province on a priority basis to establish a dedicated Secretariat to ensure all new legislation and policies are consistent with the UN Declaration, and involves consultation and cooperation with Indigenous leadership,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations.

“It must be noted that November 30 marks the one-year anniversary of the *In Plain Sight* report, that clearly identified the immense magnitude of the racism problem in BC health care. We see similar challenges and impacts to our people in the COVID-19 pandemic, in issues of homelessness, in unfair and inequitable policies harming Indigenous children, and in layers of violence and oppression faced by Indigenous women – to name a few. These are our people’s lives. The Province must immediately conclude its work on an action plan to achieve the objectives of the UN Declaration – assuring that this action plan is meaningful, concrete, ambitious, and resourced,” concluded Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Political Executive

-30-

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

For further information, contact:

Cheryl Casimer, FNS,	Phone: 778-875-2157
Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BCAFN	Phone: 250-981-2151
Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC	Phone: 250-490-5314