

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

February 21, 2024

### FNLN Deeply Frustrated with Opposition to Land Act Amendments

(xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLN) is extremely disappointed with the decision to postpone introduction of straightforward amendments to the *Land Act* that would remove barriers to commitments already made five years ago in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

Five years ago, the provincial legislature unanimously passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (“Declaration Act”), establishing a framework for the implementation of Indigenous rights in B.C., including a process for entering into agreements with First Nations about decision making. This process is public, transparent, and requires many steps to obtain a Cabinet mandate, and additional legislative amendments – such as those contemplated by proposed *Land Act* amendments – are needed to implement agreements. In other words, these amendments create space in the law to implement an agreement that may be reached in the future – agreements which are negotiated in accordance with the process and requirements of section 7 of the Declaration Act passed in 2019.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated “We are absolutely disgusted that the opposition leaders of B.C. United and the B.C. Conservatives leveraged the proposed *Land Act* amendments as a shameless opportunity for partisan political gain. Their electioneering was a coldly calculated decision to create a wedge issue despite knowing their statements were not factual, and that they would increase racist backlash toward Indigenous peoples. Indigenous rights are human rights and are not up for debate or referendum. We expect the full legislature to work together on an education campaign to this effect and work to fully implement the Declaration Act.”

The public discourse around these proposed amendments reveals two deeply troubling realities. The first is that the public, including many local government, industry, and non-governmental organization leaders, hold very little understanding of Indigenous human rights, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the Declaration Act. “BC First Nations have fought relentlessly for recognition of our basic human rights,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. “It is unacceptable that we must also bear the burden of educating every British Columbian and person treading across our territories about these rights and about decisions – such as the commitment to shared decision-making agreements – that have already been made, and supported unanimously by all members of the Legislative Assembly. It is past time that others’ ignorance is permitted to prevail over our rights.”

“It is shocking and regressive to see a small cohort of so-called leaders utilized these amendments to tap into racist fears and beliefs for their own benefits, and on the backs of First Nations people,” said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “Shame on the so-called leaders who tried to benefit from killing these amendments, for trying to drag us all back to the previous eras of conflict and uncertainty. We remain steadfast in our support for the Declaration Act and will continue to hold all provincial officials accountable for the commitment to align laws and make space for agreements that enable our fundamental rights and freedoms.”



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