



Office Of The Hereditary Chiefs Of The Gitksan And Wet'suwet'en People

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Appeal
June 15, 1993

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

B.C. COURT OF APPEAL DECISION NEARS

On Friday, June 25 the B.C. Court of Appeal will release rulings on eight cases concerning First Nation's rights and the new Canadian constitution, including decisions on the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en land title action (R. v Delgam Uukw) and Wet'suwet'en fishing rights (R. v Nikal).

A press conference is scheduled at the Hotel Vancouver convention floor at 3:00 p.m. on June 25. Members of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en nations, as well as other nations involved with the appeal cases, will respond to the rulings, conduct a question and answer session and be available for individual interviews.

That day the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en will find out whether B.C.'s courts reject Justice Alan McEachern's decision of March 8, 1991 which found against Delgam Uukw and 47 other hereditary chief's rightful claim to 58,000 square kilometres of territory in northwest B.C.

At the close of the appeal court case on July 3, 1992, the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en legal team said that if justice was to be done McEachern's decision had to be completely reversed and rights had to be established by the courts that had concrete meaning to the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en in their communities and on their land.

A United Nations Human Rights Commission report, released in April, 1993, condemned McEachern's ruling as ethnocentric.

McEachern called the pre-colonization lives of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en "nasty, brutish and short." He supported his viewpoint by saying Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en ancestors had "no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles, slavery and starvation was not uncommon and wars with neighboring peoples were common..."

The land title action is the longest running First Nations land claim court case in Canadian history, stretching back to Oct. 24, 1984. The actual trial was unique in that Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en elders took the stand to testify in their own language about their distinctive culture and spirituality.

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