



Province of
British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

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PROVINCE SUSPENDS TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WITH GITXSAN

HAZELTON - The province is suspending treaty negotiations with the Gitksan Treaty Office. Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Cashore cited fundamental differences between the province and the Gitksan over aboriginal rights.

"We do not believe it is possible to achieve an agreement-in-principle given the existing circumstances. We have decided not to continue with negotiations at this time," Cashore said.

"Clearly there is little chance of progress in negotiating aboriginal rights and jurisdictions with the Gitksan without further direction from the Supreme Court," said Cashore. "Other First Nations in the treaty process not only think it is possible but desirable to negotiate certainty on these issues."

The minister made the announcement to suspend negotiations with the Gitksan following the expiry of the Accord of Recognition and Respect which was signed in June 1994. The government will not seek a further extension of the accord.

Under the terms of the accord, the Gitksan, the neighboring Wet'suwet'en and the province sought and were granted an adjournment of the Delgamuukw appeal on issues of aboriginal rights to the Supreme Court of Canada. The parties agreed to seek a negotiated treaty settlement for each First Nation in a manner respectful of all parties' laws and traditions.

"Gitksan Houses have erected road blocks in the past in direct contravention of the spirit and intent of the accord," said Cashore. "The Gitksan have not provided the province with any assurances that similar activities won't be repeated in the future. To the contrary, they have called for "action on the land." It is just such action and rhetoric which has led the province to the inevitable conclusion that further negotiation is futile."

The province will continue to negotiate with the Wet'suwet'en. "The Wet'suwet'en have demonstrated their commitment to negotiating a treaty settlement. The provincial government has determined that there is a reasonable basis for continuing these negotiations," Cashore said.

Unless there is another adjournment, the Supreme Court of Canada is scheduled to begin hearing preliminary matters relating to the Delgamuukw appeals on aboriginal rights in mid-March. As a respondent in the case, the province has status and can speak to the issues.

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