



Gitksan Treaty Office

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Province walks from treaty table

GITKSAN TERRITORIES -- Chief negotiator Mas Gak (Don Ryan) said the decision by B.C. today to pull out of treaty talks with the Gitksan is "electioneering" at its worst.

"This is pure electioneering and political posturing," said Mas Gak after receiving a faxed letter from Minister of Aboriginal Affairs John Cashore. "Their reasons for toasting the Gitksan table cannot be justified."

The letter from Cashore said B.C. was walking away from the negotiating table because of a lack of progress and fundamental differences on the nature and scope of aboriginal rights.

Mas Gak said the fundamental differences B.C. talks about is "precisely why we have treaty negotiations. That's what the B.C. Treaty Commission process is all about." The chief negotiator said the Gitksan have consistently lead the treaty process with B.C. and Canada, tabling interest papers months in advance of the government negotiating teams.

"You can look at the record of the main table meetings and see what we've faced. If there was any lack of progress the blame falls squarely in the lap of B.C. and Canada," said Mas Gak. "As far as aboriginal rights are concerned, we never received answers to our questions on the provincial land selection position so the detailed discussion necessary to arrive at creative solutions was never able to take place at the negotiating table."

The Province now say they favour litigation which is contrary to what the courts directed in the June 25, 1993, appeal decision on the Delgam Uukw case. Today's decision also flies in the face of Premier Harcourt's commitment that the June 13, 1994, signing of the Accord of Recognition and Respect marked the beginning of "a new relationship" between B.C. and the Gitksan.

The treaty Framework Agreement signed by B.C., Canada and the Gitksan in 1995 states the B.C. Treaty Commission must be notified in writing by the party walking away from the table regarding the reasons for their action.

"It's not over," said Mas Gak. "A justification meeting must occur with the BCTC between all three parties. The hereditary chiefs have always favoured negotiation with the Crown."

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For more information contact:

Attachment: Feb. 01 letter from Cashore to Ryan

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