



Gitksan Treaty Office

NEWS RELEASE

Dec. 05, 1997
3:00 p.m. PDT

For Immediate Release

Delgamuukw decision date announced

HAZELTON, GITXSAN TERRITORIES -- The Supreme Court of Canada announced today that their judgment on the landmark Delgamuukw land title action by the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people will be released on Dec. 11 at 9:45 a.m., EDT.

"Coming just before Christmas we are wondering whether the decision is going to be a lump of coal in a sock or something better," said Gitksan chief treaty negotiator Mas Gak (Don Ryan). "Either way we are ready to continue to assert ownership, jurisdiction and self-government on our traditional territories."

The Delgamuukw case is the longest running land claims action in the Canadian courts. The appellants, 35 Gitksan and 13 Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, first filed a statement of claim in the B.C. courts 13 years ago on Oct. 23, 1984.

The decision by the Supreme Court will be released six months after the appeal took place in Ottawa on June 16-17.

"Our hope is that the decision will help the province overcome their fears about talking about aboriginal rights," said Gitksan treaty negotiator Yoobx (Elmer Derrick). "The province has created all sorts of obstacles for themselves whenever they are talking to aboriginal groups about land and resources. Maybe this decision will help them in that regard."

The Delgamuukw action is the pre-eminent First Nations land claim court case in Canada. It is unique in its scope in that the hereditary chiefs are arguing for ownership, jurisdiction and self-government over their entire 58,000 square kilometres of traditional territory rather than some specific aboriginal rights that are strictly linked to certain activities at designated sites.

The landmark decision on Dec. 11 will be used as a test against which all other First Nation land ownership and aboriginal title actions will be judged.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mas Gak (Don Ryan): (250) 842-6082 until Dec. 9; from Dec. 9 on (613) 526-9847

Yoobx (Elmer Derrick): (250) 849-5555 until Dec. 9; from Dec. 9 on (613) 232-2200

Anuthlem buhn (Gordon Sebastian): until Dec. 9 (604) 601-6351 or 669-7070; from Dec. 9 on (250) 842-6511