

Draft

Chiefs, honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I want to begin by thanking Gitanmaax for welcoming us into their village.

I am very pleased to be here this morning and I am honoured to sign this document on behalf of the Gitxsan.

Today, we begin a new journey towards the reconciliation of Gitxsan Title and the underlying Title held by Her Majesty the Queen in Right of British Columbia on Gitxsan land. The Reconciliation Agreement we sign today sets out a framework for a negotiated process to achieve this goal. Both parties have the legal and moral duty to enter into and conduct these negotiations in good faith. Negotiations in good faith means, we must conclude the agreements envisioned in this document. We must reach a settlement that will accommodate the Province of British Columbia's political and economic aspirations. The Gitxsan are prepared to negotiate hard. We are prepared to give and take in the negotiations as well.

The Gitxsan have shared with British Columbia the resources and revenues that come off our territories without an agreement for a long time. The Gitxsan want to negotiate agreements to change this situation. The Gitxsan will no longer take a passive role in managing their House territories. We have witnessed the collapse of our salmon and timber resources due to over-harvesting. Our House Groups must act now to protect what resources are left on the House Territories as a way to turn around the critical state of the regional resource economy. In fact, the Gitxsan are prepared to design joint management models by integrating our House based model with landscape units.

The Gitxsan are not interested in protracted negotiations. For example, we have already spent years trying to conclude a consultation protocol for Forests Use. We need to conclude these negotiations so that we can have meaningful consultation leading to joint management decisions on Forest Use on Gitxsan land. We are not interested in watching grants of interests in land and resources continue while we negotiate. We have to move quickly to remedy this situation. We do not need a treaty to accomplish this.

Gitxsan Title is not a concept. Gitxsan Title exists on the land. Gitxsan Title means our House Groups own their House territories. It also means our sovereignty as a collective of House Groups is intact. The Supreme Court of Canada moved closer to understand Gitxsan Title when it said Aboriginal Title was a right to the exclusive use and occupation of land and which can be used for a variety of activities but contains certain inherent limits.

In conclusion, British Columbia must use this reconciliation process to follow and strengthen Gitxsan laws and institutions. In turn, the Gitxsan must assist British Columbia in developing progressive resource extraction policies and laws which can accommodate the political and economic aspirations of the province. These new policies and laws will sustain and restore each House territory. The economic opportunities are here to benefit all including the local non- Gitxsan society. The reconciliation of Gitxsan Title and the underlying Title of the Crown is a difficult task but we must make a serious attempt to conclude the negotiations this time. Thank you for your attention and your support.

Delgamuukw
Gitanmaax, Gitxsan Territories
Tuesday, September 15, 1998