



Thousands of Aboriginal People March on Legislature and Demand Respect

PRESS RELEASE

MAY 20, 2004

(Victoria/Coast Salish Territory) Over 2400 Aboriginal leaders, elders, youth, community members and supporters from every corner of the province marched to the BC legislature today to demonstrate unity in the face of increasing assaults on their land.

“We were at the Legislature today to demonstrate our complete disappointment with the federal and provincial governments’ continued denial of the existence of Aboriginal Peoples, Aboriginal Title and Aboriginal Rights,” said Grand Chief Edward John, First Nations Summit Task Group Member.

“Only Aboriginal Peoples can provide the certainty that the provincial Crown and resource industries are craving,” said Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Until the just accommodation of our Aboriginal Title occurs, neither businesses nor their investors will have the economic certainty they seek.”

Earlier, Forest Minister Mike de Jong had denounced the *Title & Rights Alliance* supporters as “malcontents” saying they were “misinformed,” citing the accommodation agreements his government is touting as evidence of positive relations with First Nations.

“It is time for true, honest, fair negotiations with Aboriginal Peoples about land and resources,” said Justa Monk, Co-chair, Northwest Tribal Treaty Nation, “not ‘take-it or leave-it’ accommodation deals that force us to give up the ability to exercise our rights for token economic benefits.”

“The agreements that have been signed are nothing but trinkets and beads,” said Chief Liz Logan, Chairperson of the Treaty 8 Tribal Association. “We own the resources. Treaty 8 and all First Nations want to be part of decision-making about land and resources.”

“The provincial government needs to demonstrate respect for the land and our people,” said Guujaaw, President of the Council of the Haida Nation. “We are not here to talk about dying for our rights; we’re here to celebrate living them.”

The *Title and Rights Alliance* is a new collective initiative among all major provincial and regional First Nations organizations, standing unified in the face of threats by the provincial Crown and resource industries to Aboriginal Title and Treaty Rights; using all available means to achieve recognition of Aboriginal Title and Rights; resisting divide-and-conquer tactics; and holding the federal Crown accountable for its fiduciary obligations to Aboriginal Peoples.

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