

All Canadians Benefit When Modern Treaties Are Fully Implemented

(February 28, 2013, Ottawa) Convening on the 40th anniversary of the historic Calder judgment by the Supreme Court of Canada, political leaders at the Land Claims Agreements Coalition national conference today called upon the Government of Canada to fully and fairly implement modern treaties. Mr. Justice Thomas Berger, the lawyer who argued the Calder case, encouraged the Coalition to hold the Government of Canada accountable for modern treaty implementation.

Cathy Towtongie, President of Nunavut Tunngavik, and Mitchell Stevens, President of the Nisga'a Nation and co-chairs of the Land Claims Agreements Coalition, confirmed their willingness to work co-operatively with Bernard Valcourt, the recently appointed Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

“The lack of implementation represents a missed opportunity for all Canadians,” said President Stevens. “A recent study showed that the cost of non-implementation is hundreds of millions of dollars per year. This is not acceptable to the modern treaty holders and it should not be acceptable to Canadians.” He said that implementing treaties allows Aboriginal people to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient, a goal shared by all Canadians.

Speakers and panelists at the “Keeping the Promise: The Path Ahead to Full Modern Treaty Implementation” conference echoed these sentiments and reminded delegates that much has been accomplished in the past 40 years since the first modern treaty was signed in Quebec, but remains much work to be done.

Terry Audla, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, said “the promise of the Treaty Relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal People has been badly eroded,” pointing to the lack of implementation of policies in key areas such as health, education, housing and food security.

Matthew Coon Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees said “Modern treaties are an essential part of the foundation of this country. The legitimacy of Canada’s claim to these lands, and to the resources they hold is entirely dependent on these treaties. If the solemn promises contained in modern treaties are not implemented according to their full spirit and intent, there remains a fundamental defect in Canada’s very foundation.”

Shawn Atleo, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations pledged AFN’s support to the land claims coalition. The Land Claims Coalition, whose membership consists of all modern treaty organizations in Canada, announced its intent to develop a Report Card

on Modern Treaty Implementation. All modern treaty holders agree that the Government of Canada is failing in its obligation to uphold the spirit and intent of modern treaties and to develop policies and work effectively with treaty holders to implement them.

“In relation to Aboriginal issues, the media focuses on community accountability said Ruth Massie, Grand Chief of the Council for Yukon First Nations. “We insist that the Government of Canada be accountable for its part of the treaty relationship. This is why we will develop the Implementation Report Card, in co-operation with third party organizations and academics.”

Formed in 2003, the Land Claims Agreements Coalition brings together all Canadian modern treaty organizations in Canada. The Coalition’s mandate is to press the Government of Canada to respect, honour and fully implement comprehensive land claims and associated self-government agreements in order to achieve their objectives. Taken collectively, modern treaties affect nearly half of Canada’s lands, waters and resources.

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