



PRESS RELEASE - For immediate release

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## **BC puts a wrench in treaty negotiations**

Late last week the province rejected the appointment of George Abbott as new Chief Commissioner for the BC Treaty Commission. Abbott was poised to assume the role at the departure of current Chief Commissioner Sophie Pierre, until the rejection of his appointment at the last minute. “It’s disappointing and disheartening that the Province of British Columbia has taken such unilateral action that can impact so many First Nations including our local efforts” says Tsimshian Treaty Society Chief Negotiator Gerald Wesley.

Abbott’s appointment was approved by the three principals - Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Summit – after months of discussion. The First Nations Summit and the BC Treaty Commission were quick to condemn this seemingly arbitrary move stating it has called into question the sincerity of the province to negotiate in good faith.

Chief Joe Bevan of Kitselas says, “They didn't consult with the Principals, or First Nations Summit, nor have they consulted with us. The province is demonstrating a total lack of commitment to the treaty process, if they are to come out with a new policy on treaty making wouldn’t you think it right to inform the First Nations of what that may look like so that we too can adjust our approach?”

It appears as though the provincial government wants to make sweeping changes to the BC treaty process without the engagement or consultation of the First Nations. “Let’s hope the new direction that Premier Clark talks about does not lead to economic disaster and clouds of uncertainty for the province of British Columbia. First Nations have a strong voice in how developments in this province proceed, we want certainty and opportunities which will provide best options and balance for First Nations, business, and government. Treaty-making is a strong component of that.” says Wesley.

In terms of negotiations, the Tsimshian First Nations Treaty Society will be watching with interest as the Principals process convenes to determine next steps. In 1991, the Principals determined and then confirmed that the best way for addressing aboriginal issues and to provide certainty and economic as well as social progress in this province was for ***“The First Nations, Canada, and British Columbia establish a new relationship based on mutual trust, respect and understanding — through political negotiations.”*** Wesley says this is still the direction of communities he represents and treaty negotiations are the political negotiations agreed to.

The Tsimshian First Nations Treaty Society is the treaty coordinating body for Kitselas, Kitsumkalum, Metlakatla, Gitga’at and Kitasoo communities.

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