

Postal Address:

205 Beaver Road, Suite 1
Smithers, BC
V0J 2N1

**Location Address:**

3873 – 1st Avenue
Smithers, BC

Telephone: (250) 847-3630

Facsimile: (250) 847-5381

www.wetsuweten.com

Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs Seek Reconciliation

(Wet'suwet'en Yintah Territory/Smithers, B.C. - November 23, 2016) The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs are compelled to express their profound disappointment with Premier Christy Clark's refusal to meet for the purpose of advancing reconciliation efforts between the respective governments. Notice was received of the Premier's visit from the Smithers District Chamber of Commerce on Friday, November 18, 2016, and a meeting request was quickly sent to the Premier's office to enable the Chiefs to hand deliver a draft of the *Wet'suwet'en Recognition & Reconciliation Framework Agreement* for the purpose of advancing government-to-government negotiations. A Premier's office official called and advised that Premier Clark had no time to meet with the Hereditary Chiefs.

Dini ze' Na'moks (John Ridsdale), of the Tsayu (Beaver) Clan, stated, "Our Chiefs have worked tirelessly this past year researching and drafting a framework agreement that reflects our Wet'suwet'en rights and title interests. This calls into question the sincerity of Premier Clark and her government's commitment to work with the Wet'suwet'en with integrity and honour, to advance the reconciliation of our respective government's rights and title interests. We've been engaged in discussions regarding reconciliation through government-to-government negotiations since early 2014, and well before that, during and after the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* case. BC knows the strength of our rights and title interests, and we have made numerous requests to meet with Premier Clark; sadly, those requests have gone unanswered."

The Province of British Columbia (BC) has signed government-to-government agreements with First Nations throughout B.C. for the stated purposes of reconciling First Nations rights and title with Crown jurisdiction, to close the socio-economic gaps that separate Aboriginal people from other British Columbians, and, to create measures that result in First Nation members benefitting economically from the use of the traditional territories.

"This is deeply concerning on many levels," expressed *dini ze' Madeek* (Jeff Brown), of the Gitdumden (Grizzly House) Clan. "It is our *anuk nu'at'en*, our Wet'suwet'en law, that when dignitaries from external governments come to our *Yintah*, that they are received by our chiefs and officially welcomed, that is our protocol, and this is being ignored by Premier Clark which is disrespectful to our chiefs, our members, and our ancestors."

"We have resided on our Wet'suwet'en *Yintah* since time immemorial, and we will continue to live here, raise our families and future generations and exercise our self-government jurisdiction; we cannot be ignored and we feel slighted as Premier Clark had the opportunity to do the right thing and spare 20 minutes to meet with us. Reconciliation requires commitment and sincere action.

Sadly, this decision contradicts this governments veiled commitment to reconciliation and recognition with respect to the Wet'suwet'en," stated Debbie Pierre, Executive Director for the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. "After what our people have gone through historically, residential schools, the '60's scoop, the banning of our *Bah'lats* (Feast) governance system, and the continuous denial of our rights; and the ongoing attempts of our leaders to create space with both governments for the betterment of all, it saddens my heart as our people are proud and deserve so much better. Despite the premier's decision, we are strong and resilient people, and as our venerable chiefs who testified in the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* case courageously demonstrated, 'we are right here, you cannot deny that we exist', we are not going away. We have responsibilities to our people, our lands, and our future generations. It is incumbent upon BC to move forward with us in a collaborative way through negotiations of a government to government agreement with the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs."

For Media Inquiries please contact:

Dini ze' Na'moks (John Ridsdale): Office of the Wet'suwet'en - 250-847-3630
Cell: 250-643-0771