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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 30, 2007

First Nations of British Columbia Issue Declaration Affirming Aboriginal Title

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver – First Nations Leaders from across British Columbia have issued a declaration affirming Aboriginal Title to their respective traditional territories across British Columbia. The declaration (attached) entitled "*All Our Relations*", celebrates the victory of the Tsilhqot'in and Xeni Gwet'in peoples in last week's important BC Supreme Court decision in *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. BC*.

More than 120 First Nations leaders gathered in North Vancouver this week for a First Nations Leadership Strategic Planning Session to examine the important *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. BC* decision and to develop a unified strategy for the recognition of Aboriginal Title.

"The government of Canada must respect the standards established by and in numerous court decisions – respecting the rule of law and negotiate on the basis of the existence of our peoples, our Aboriginal Rights and Title", said Grand Chief Edward John, a member of the First Nations Summit political executive.

"Without question, the Indigenous Nations of British Columbia are on the brink of collectively exercising our sovereign authority and inherent jurisdiction over the management of the resources within our Aboriginal title lands", said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs

"In addition to its powerful legal aspects, the *Tsilhqot'in* decision has also served to unite First Nations across the province," said BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief A-in-chut (Shawn Atleo). "It is through the strengthening of these relationships that our people can put ourselves in a position to speak with one voice and achieve our goals," he added.

The First Nations Leadership Council has sent a letter on behalf of the First Nations of British Columbia to the Governments of Canada and British Columbia formally demanding the Crown;

1. Officially recognize Tsilhqot'in Aboriginal title in the areas the Court stated the Tsilhqot'in have proven title.
2. Recognize that First Nations in British Columbia have Aboriginal title and rights throughout their entire territories.

3. Commit to negotiations to settle the Land Question in B.C. as directed by the Courts based on true recognition and reconciliation of Aboriginal title and rights.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

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Background on the BC Supreme Court decision in *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. BC*

Justice Vickers, of the British Columbia Supreme Court, released his decision on November 21, 2007 in the land claim case of *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*.

Justice Vickers found that:

1. The Tsilhqot'in people have proven their Aboriginal title to nearly one half of the Claim Area.
2. The Tsilhqot'in people have Aboriginal rights, including the right to trade furs to obtain a moderate livelihood, throughout the Claim Area.
3. The province's Forest Act does not apply within Aboriginal title lands.
4. The province has infringed the Aboriginal rights and title of the Tsilhqot'in people, and has no justification for doing this.
5. Canada's Parliament has unacceptably denied and avoided its constitutional responsibility to protect Aboriginal lands and aboriginal rights.

"ALL OUR RELATIONS"

A DECLARATION OF THE SOVEREIGN INDIGENOUS NATIONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

We, the Indigenous leaders of British Columbia, come together united and celebrate the victory of the Tsilhqot'in and Xeni Gwet'in peoples in securing recognition of their Aboriginal title and rights – and all those Indigenous Nations and individuals that have brought important court cases over the years resulting in significant contributions in the protection and advancement of Aboriginal title and rights, including the Nisga'a, Gitksan, Wet'suwet'in, Haida, Taku River Tlingit, Musqueam, Heiltsuk and Sto:lo - shining light on the darkness of years of Crown denial of our title and rights. After pursuing different pathways, we now come together to make this solemn Declaration out of our common desire to be unified in affirming our Aboriginal title.

As the original Peoples to this land, we declare:

- We have Aboriginal title and rights to our lands, waters and resources and that we will exercise our collective, sovereign and inherent authorities and jurisdictions over these lands, waters and resources,
- We respect, honour and are sustained by the values, teachings and laws passed to us by our ancestors for governing ourselves, our lands, waters and resources.
- We have the right to manage and benefit from the wealth of our territories.
- We have the inalienable sovereign right of self-determination. By virtue of this right, we are free to determine our political status and free to pursue our economic, social, health and well-being, and cultural development.
- We have diverse cultures, founded on the ways of life, traditions and values of our ancestors, which include systems of governance, law and social organization.
- We have the right to compensation and redress with regard to our territories, lands and resources which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without our free, prior and informed consent.
- We will only negotiate on the basis of a full and complete recognition of the existence of our title and rights throughout our entire lands, waters, territories and resources.
- We acknowledge the interdependence we have with one another and respectfully honour our commitment with one another where we share lands, waters and resources. We commit to resolving these shared lands, waters and resources based on our historical relationship through ceremonies and reconciliation agreements.
- We endorse the provisions of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and other international standards aimed at ensuring the dignity, survival and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

We commit to:

- Stand united today and from this time forward with the Tsilhqot'in and with each other in protecting our Aboriginal title and rights.
- Recognize and respect each other's autonomy and support each other in exercising our respective title, rights and jurisdiction in keeping with our continued interdependency.
- Work together to defend and uphold this Declaration.

We, the undersigned, represent First Nations who carry a mandate to advance Title and Rights in our homelands today referred to as British Columbia and exercise our authorities in making this Declaration. We welcome other First Nations not present today to adhere to this Declaration if they so choose.

Signed by First Nations leaders on November 29, 2007