



Statement from Wet'suwet'en Elected Leadership

May 14, 2020 — Following this morning's signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Federal and BC governments, and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, the Elected Chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation have issued the following statement:

"It is with profound disappointment that we, as the Elected Chiefs and Councils of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, find ourselves in the position to make a statement regarding the non-consensual signing of the MOU regarding the future of our nation. This process moved ahead without listening to the democratically elected members of the Wet'suwet'en communities, and we believe this is a travesty on our people.

We are utterly disgusted that although others were invited to witness the signing today by remote technology, no such invitation was extended to the Elected Chiefs and Councils. The contempt that Canada, BC and the Office of Wet'suwet'en continue to show to the democratically elected representatives of the Wet'suwet'en people is bottomless.

We must express our complete lack of confidence in all parties in this fast-tracked negotiation process. They have no mandate from the people and the simple logistics of trying to carry out complex negotiations during a pandemic are formidable.

The provincial and federal governments and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en initialed this MOU in secrecy almost three months ago, yet it was just one week ago that we finally received a copy of the MOU from the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, after numerous requests. The parties have ignored all of our concerns and challenges regarding the MOU and the process at hand. They have all committed to free, prior and informed consent in order to move forward with processes that affect Indigenous people. This process has not allowed for that.

We have made various proposals to restructure the negotiations and enable our membership to make an informed decision on this matter, but all were refused."

We absolutely reject the characterization that this is nothing more than a framework for a path forward. The MOU sets up a reckless negotiation process with predetermined outcomes that will not respect the interests of all Wet'suwet'en people, much less the interests of other British Columbians. At every turn, we informed the three parties that this was not a valid process, but they were determined to move forward with complete disregard to the voices of the people.

As Elected Chiefs and Councils, we will be considering all options available to us in order to meet the responsibilities to our members in relation to this MOU. We are doing due diligence and meeting our fiduciary obligations to our members, holding us accountable to our people.

We feel it is important to reiterate that this MOU is not validly approved by the Wet'suwet'en people. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to have sufficient meetings with the people to hear their voices and opinions. This lack of proper consultation and secrecy means the governments have acted in bad faith contrary to the Honour of the Crown.

The Elected Councils have an interest in seeing Wet'suwet'en rights and title properly negotiated and implemented. Aboriginal rights and title are the collective rights of ALL Wet'suwet'en people; they are not held only by Hereditary Chiefs and they cannot be defined or compromised by the small hand-picked group the government has been dealing with. The proper processes and rule of law, including proper respect for our traditional laws, must be followed.

Today, we are calling for the following actions:

To Minister Carolyn Bennett: We uphold our call for your resignation, immediately, as Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations.

To Minister Marc Miller: We call for you to speak up regarding your intention to protect the programs and services the Wet'suwet'en people depend on.

To the Office of the Wet'suwet'en: We lack any confidence whatever in your intention to fairly represent the interests of all Wet'suwet'en people. We request that you suspend negotiation of your backroom treaty and work together with the members and Elected Chiefs and Councils to develop a proper process and mandate so that negotiations can proceed in good faith.

Chief Rosemarie Skin, Skin Tyee Nation
Chief Dan George, Burns Lake Band (Ts'il Kaz Koh) First Nation
Chief Maureen Luggi, Wet'suwet'en First Nation
Chief Patricia Prince, Nee Tahi Buhn Indian Band