



TŜILHQOT'IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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Tsilhqot'in Applaud Affirmation of Aboriginal Rights by BC Court of Appeal

Vancouver, B.C., June 27, 2012: The Tsilhqot'in Nation has never ceded nor surrendered our title and rights and this point was proven today. Since before the time of contact we have protected and defended our lands, waters and territories.

“Taking our fight to the B.C. Court system is just one step in a much larger struggle that we share with First Nations across B.C. and Canada and should serve as notice to the BC and federal government that the status quo is not viable,” said Chief Joe Alphonse, Tribal Chairman of the Tsilhqot'in National Government.

The Tsilhqot'in leadership received today's BC Court of Appeal decision honourably alongside Grand Chief Stewart Phillip from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould from the B.C. Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN). The Court of Appeal largely upheld the late Justice Vicker's ruling in the William case, meaning that B.C.'s forest licenses remain struck down, that the Tsilhqot'in have court-recognized Aboriginal rights throughout the claim area, and that the previous Judge's order is upheld in its entirety.

“We are pleased that the Court of Appeal upheld the Late Justice Vicker's findings with regards to the recognition of our Aboriginal rights and the unjust infringement by BC's forestry regime. However, the Court's regressive attitude on the meaning of Aboriginal title creates uncertainty for all Canadians. We will take this key issue to the Supreme Court of Canada. This is a fundamental question for all First Nations,” said Chief Marilyn Baptiste of the Xenigwet'in.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation takes strong issue with the Court of Appeal's view that Aboriginal title is limited to small 'postage-stamp' areas that does not protect the hunting, trapping and gathering areas that have sustained our Nation since time immemorial. This impoverished view of Aboriginal title is completely unacceptable.

“The BC Court of Appeal decision has led to more uncertainty. Our people know that we have title to our lands and the right to govern ourselves. The BC Court of Appeal does not have the final word on this issue. All of our First Nations will support the Tsilhqot'in in their ongoing efforts for justice,” said BC Assembly of First Nations Chief Jody Wilson Raybould.

“The governments need to take this opportunity to recognize Aboriginal Title in its full form. We want this to lead to reconciliation and not to conflict or confrontation.” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the UBCIC.

“What led to this was industry trying to come into the Brittany Triangle for our resources, and to infringe on our Aboriginal rights from clear-cut logging. Many of our Elders who speak only Tsilhqot'in testified in this process. Many are no longer with us, and this ongoing fight is in honour of all of our Elders and future generations,” said Councillor Roger William from Xenigwet'in.

A Press Conference will be held at the Union of BC Indians Chiefs Office (342 Water Street, 5th Floor, Vancouver, BC) at 11:30AM PST.

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