



BC TREATY COMMISSION

203 -1155 W. Pender St.
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 2P4
Tel 604 482 9200. Fax 604 482 9222
Toll Free 1800 665 8330
info@bctreaty.net. www.bctreaty.net

Backgrounder

Our Sacred Strength, Talking Circles Among Aboriginal Women

As keeper of the BC treaty process, the Treaty Commission observed the under representation of aboriginal women at the treaty table. In March 1999, the Treaty Commission brought together 11 aboriginal women from different regions of the province—Alert Bay, Cranbrook, North Vancouver, Terrace, Tsawwassen, Victoria, Waglisla, Williams Lake and Westbank—to identify the information needs of aboriginal women and appropriate delivery systems. The focus group included women of a wide range of ages from both urban and rural areas with both professional and non-professional backgrounds.

The women identified two overriding communication challenges: access to information and lack of interest in the treaty process. Women expressed concern that treaty making is a male-dominated process, and as such, focuses on issues such as land and resources, rather than on issues of prime concern to aboriginal women such as families, health and child welfare. The group also noted that it's difficult for aboriginal women to speak out at male-dominated meetings, and even when women do take the initiative to express their views, their voices are often overpowered.

The focus group urged the Treaty Commission to facilitate a series of 'talking circles' among aboriginal women. Building on that suggestion, the Treaty Commission struck an aboriginal women's steering committee to oversee the production of a film featuring talking circles among aboriginal women. Under their guidance, five talking circles were convened and captured on film. These talking circles span British Columbia to the Yukon, including remote, rural and urban First Nations, and represent a diversity of individual involvement in treaty negotiations and leadership. While the talking circles present very different perspectives, and very different ways of dealing with issues, the women share many of the same challenges and many of the same goals for the future.

The film, *Our Sacred Strength, Talking Circles Among Aboriginal Women*, features highlights from discussion among Ktunaxa women in Cranbrook, Gitksan women in Hazelton, Kaska women in Watson Lake, Yukon, Tseil-Waututh women in North Vancouver and a group of aboriginal women living in Vancouver. Their stories reveal aboriginal women's sacred strength—past, present and future.

Through screening the film at various public forums and providing it to aboriginal communities across BC, the Treaty Commission hopes to engage aboriginal women in talking circles of their own and empower women to get involved in shaping the future of their communities.

About the Treaty Commission

The Treaty Commission is the independent and neutral body responsible for facilitating treaty negotiations among the governments of Canada, BC and First Nations in BC.

For more information:

Brian Mitchell, Communications Manager
BC Treaty Commission
604 482 9215. Toll Free 1800 665 8330
info@bctreaty.net. www.bctreaty.net