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NEWS RELEASE**

Treaty Commission releases 11th Annual Report

VICTORIA – There continue to be conflicting views on how much progress is being made in treaty negotiations, says the Treaty Commission in its 11th annual report.

On the one hand there have been heartfelt displays of celebration to welcome four agreements in principle. On the other hand there have been First Nations people protesting on the lawns of the legislature citing a continuing denial of aboriginal rights as the reason for their action.

“While it is true treaties have never been closer in British Columbia, it is also true that much of the groundbreaking negotiation is taking place at only a handful of tables,” the report states.

Four First Nations expect to conclude final agreements early in 2005 if they are able to maintain the current pace of intensive negotiations and reach agreement on all outstanding issues. Another dozen First Nations aim to conclude agreements in principle in 2005 or 2006.

“While we acknowledge there is a greater degree of recognition for First Nations than was the case when the treaty process began, we cannot ignore the First Nations who are saying that aboriginal rights continued to be denied,” the report states. “A measure of their dissatisfaction is the number of First Nations taking court action while still at the treaty table.”

The Treaty Commission has served notice that it will be more public and assertive in taking stances when the Principals or the parties in negotiations do not adhere to the 10 task force recommendations identified in its Mission Statement released in June.

Where obstacles at specific tables are preventing progress, the Treaty Commission will take action through intensive facilitation efforts. Among other things, the Treaty Commission will encourage the parties to conclude interim measures agreements as an early form of mutual recognition and to temporarily protect the First Nation’s interests pending the completion of treaties.

For more information contact:
Brian Mitchell
Communications Manager
604-482-9200 or 604-788-5190
info@bctreaty.net

or

Kenzie Andrews
Communications Officer
604-482-9217