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TREATY COMMISSION URGES FIRST NATIONS TO ACT ON RECOMMENDATIONS

CRANBROOK—The Treaty Commission has urged First Nations to take action on the recommendations included in its eighth annual report.

Speaking to the province's First Nations leaders meeting here today, Chief Commissioner Miles Richardson said, "First Nations and the governments of Canada and British Columbia have to rethink treaty making to deliver more immediate benefits through new types of agreements while talks continue on the major issues common to all negotiations."

Richardson said all First Nation leaders must re-examine their expectations and their visions for treaties and how to realize those goals through incremental steps. "In developing your vision among your people you must look at ways in which the new relationship will work on the ground."

The report is critical of some First Nations that have "an unclear vision about their own futures, making it difficult to work towards a successful treaty." More problematic, the report says, is the conflicting messages delivered by the governments of Canada and British Columbia as to their goals in treaty making. The Treaty Commission is urging all of the parties to be clear about what is on the table in treaty negotiations.

While comprehensive treaties remain the goal to end the uncertainty over land use and jurisdiction in this province, in its report the Treaty Commission says it is critical to establish building blocks and that is best accomplished through a series of incremental agreements.

Richardson said First Nations must do a better job of informing their people about the negotiations and the First Nation Summit must have the resources to be more effective in high level talks representing First Nations.

"The First Nations Summit needs more resources to effectively participate in high level talks on more issues with the governments of Canada and British Columbia and it must do a better job of sharing information among First Nations so that timely and effective negotiations are possible," said the chief commissioner.

This was the first opportunity for the Treaty Commission to speak to First Nations following the release earlier this week of its eighth annual report, which includes a comprehensive review of the BC treaty process.

For more information contact:
Brian Mitchell
Communications Manager
British Columbia Treaty Commission
604 482-9215
info@bctreaty.net