





Neskonlith Indian Band

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November 13, 2001

The Honourable Geoff Plant
Ministry of Attorney General and
Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations
P.O. Box 9290 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9J7

Fax: (250) 387 6411

Dear Minister Plant:

I very much regret your termination of our discussions that you indicated in your letter of November 8, 2001. As you know we entered into those discussions without any major preconditions respecting Sun Peaks and we intended to continue in that spirit. I had hoped that you would also see the advantage of opening up a dialogue on the substantive Aboriginal title issues that need to be addressed in order to build mutual trust between the province and my peoples in the interior of British Columbia. But your precondition that my people abandon their traditional territory and return to our federal Indian Reserve before you will consider speaking to us is not acceptable to my peoples.

The problem, from our point of view, is that once again you are demanding that we back up and accommodate settlers' interests before you will even speak to us about our rights. Might I remind you that among the important subjects of the discussions we had was the existence of our Aboriginal title and rights to our lands. It is very unreasonable that you insist that we vacate our lands before you will even discuss our right to use and occupy our lands.

In your letter you cite "tensions" in the area as the reason we must vacate our lands and this to me is another blatant use of the double-standard. For example, you would not consider me meeting with the Sun Peaks business community because you said that you could not "guarantee my security" from violent threats from Sun Peaks supporters. Then you say you cannot speak to me because the non-Native public feels that their safety is threatened as a result of "the perception of increased violence and past aggressive behavior by occupants of the protest camps." In other words, I cannot speak to Sun Peaks because of the violence of the Sun Peaks residents, and you will not speak to me because the Sun Peaks residents "perceive" aggressiveness on our part. Our peoples count for nothing in this equation – they are simply told, like you would children, to shut

their mouths and return to their tiny Reserve before you will communicate with them further.

In our recent meetings, the people at the protest camp, who will be sending you their own People to Government letter, fear that as soon as they leave the camps, your government will once again begin issuing leases that will further alienate their Aboriginal title lands. Their conviction, unfortunately, is based on a hundred years of painful experience.

The tone of your letter, and fact that you are referring the matter back to BCAL, suggests that your solution is a Pontius Pilot like washing of your hands and opening the way for the mass arrest of the Elders, land-users and youth for "trespassing" on their own territory. I believe this is a travesty of justice and one that will do great harm to the prospect of our peoples reconciling their interests in this part of the province. It will mean indignities to our Elders, loss and disruption to our land-users and further embitter our youth. My preference, and the preference of my peoples, was the honourable one of open dialogue without preconditions. It is saddening to see that you appear to be choosing another course of action.

What you must understand, however, is that even these mass arrests will not deter us from using our Aboriginal title lands as we have from time immemorial. You might be able to use your police to grab and hand-cuff our Elders, land-users and youth and to haul them away. But you will not be able to keep them away from their land. They will return and all our people will return. Because it is our land and even the Supreme Court of Canada has acknowledged that our title exists and it cannot be extinguished by anyone, and certainly not by the functionaries of BCAL. So the tensions, that I had hoped we could lessen through open dialogue, will continue to increase.

On Wednesday, November 14, we will be announcing our response to your unilateral breaking off of discussions. Our response will include the launch of a campaign throughout British Columbia, Canada and internationally to protect our Aboriginal title and our inalienable right to inhabit our own lands.

At the same time, should circumstances change on your part, we will remain open to further discussions in the form and in the spirit of unconditional dialogue.

Sincerely,



Chief Arthur Manuel

c.c. National Chief Matthew Coon Come
Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC
International Support Organizations