

B.C. FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY COUNCIL



For Immediate Release

First Nations Support of Olympics Threatened by Failed Commitments

January 5. Coast Salish Territory/ Vancouver: After years of fading hope that the New Relationship would produce real change, forest-dependent First Nations cannot sit back as billions of dollars are spent on the Vancouver Olympics while they continue to be stonewalled and told that they are not a priority.

The BC government must act quickly to implement the First Nations recommendations from its Forestry Roundtable report and other outstanding measures, the BC First Nations Forestry Council (FNFC) said today. “Our communities are tired of being told there is no new funding available – and that they might have to make do with even less than they already have – and at the same time being told they should be excited about the 2010 Winter Olympics,” said FNFC President Leonard Thomas.

“The riches grabbed from First Nations traditional lands over the last 150 years have allowed the Province to reach the stage where it can mount a \$3-billion international sporting event,” said Mr. Thomas. “There is no justification in telling our First Nations that there is no money left over to provide what amounts each year to 1000ths of the cost of those Games to address the dire conditions that they are experiencing.”

The FNFC has written to the Minister of Forests and Range Pat Bell seeking an urgent meeting to discuss what his government is prepared to do to allow First Nations communities to embrace the Games.

“We are all proud of the Host First Nations and the example they set to the world of what can be achieved,” said FNFC Vice President Bill Williams, who is Chief of the Olympics Host Squamish First Nation.

Chief Williams added: “But unless action is taken to address the long-standing needs and concerns of the vast majority of our communities, the FNFC will reluctantly, but without hesitation, use the international media contacts at our disposal to shine the global spotlight on the reality that is life for most First Nations communities. We are already developing a peaceful information strategy for the foreign media.”

The FNFC is seeking immediate action from the Provincial government to make good on the March 2009 Roundtable recommendations to reform tenure for First Nations and replace the inadequate revenue sharing system. It is also seeking three-year funding to sustain programmes and services to member communities.

In addition, a letter has been sent to Federal International Trade Minister Stockwell Day seeking a meeting to discuss long overdue funding from Ottawa to address the devastating impacts of the mountain pine beetle, and to help communities develop economic opportunities and capacity.

If these issues are not addressed, nothing will have been done to change the reality that resource development in British Columbia is severely hampered and cannot proceed with any speed or certainty as long as First Nations – on whose traditional lands all resources lie – continue to be sidelined. Nothing will have been done to address the fact that a vast area of BC’s forest – larger than several European nations – has been turned into a greenhouse gas emitter as it dies and rots. And the staggering unemployment rates of up to 90% and the poverty this creates for the vast majority of BC First Nations will remain unchanged.

“If these are the messages that the governments wish us to share with the global investment and environmental communities and with Canada’s political and trading partners, then we will indeed shine the spotlight on these ugly realities that lie behind their \$3-billion sales pitch to the world,” said Mr. Thomas.

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