



WE ARE THE GITXSAN

We are the Gitksan, a native nation 13,000 strong. For thousands of years we have lived in our traditional territory of 33,000 km. sq. in north western British Columbia. We have a message of hope for the people of Canada during this election campaign. This is from the Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs, representing our people according to custom and in constant contact with them through our feast system.

Many decades ago, European settlers came to our lands and took them without agreement or compensation. Against our wishes we were turned into "Indians", with most of our people forced on to tiny Reserves. We had always looked after ourselves, but without our lands we could no longer do so. Our society was further undermined by the newcomers' laws, disease and welfare. Poverty, unemployment and even suicide became commonplace. Our culture was made illegal and for many years we were even denied access to the courts.

But we have been more fortunate than most indigenous nations. We have survived. Our language and culture is strong. And finally, almost fifteen years ago and led by our Hereditary Chiefs, we won an order from the Supreme Court of Canada in our case known as Delgamuukw. This judgment recognized our existence, said that aboriginal title exists within our lands and mandated reconciliation with Canada. Before and after that judgment we have diligently sought that end.

However progress has been far too slow. Having received justice from the Court, we now wish for that judgment to finally be made real by receiving justice from the governments that have ignored the Court.. That is our appeal during this election campaign.

We wish to be governed like all other Canadians, by the laws of towns and the provincial and federal governments accommodating Gitksan interests, and to receive the usual services from these governments. In return we expect to pay all taxes just as any other Canadians.

We do not wish ongoing Indian governments in our territory to continue to receive taxpayers' money from Ottawa. That money should go to the provincial governments to provide better services to our people than those currently under-provided by under-funded Bands.

We respect the interest of some groups in having a continuing Indian government as provided for in the standard treaty model, with law making authority and continuing subsidies. But these are parallel Indian societies, "super-Reserves" in effect, and that is not our wish. We want to be full partners in Canadian society. Thus our goal includes an end to the Indian Act in our territory, and the means to once again support ourselves.

We are proud to be Gitksan and wish to continue as such, with a strong language and culture. Looking after that is our job.

We claim as well the Gitksan inheritance, which is an interest in our traditional territories of 33,000 km. sq. and resources as recognized and described by the Supreme Court of Canada. We want to participate in Canadian society in a manner that will enable us to support ourselves based on our Section 35 constitutional rights and our ability to generate wealth from our territories. All Canadians have the right of inheritance. This is ours. The exact manner of this accommodation is for negotiation.

Negotiations have gone on for many, many years. Progress has been far too slow. Governments have little incentive to urgency. Politicians and bureaucrats have jobs and good lives and go home at night to comfortable homes. For us, progress is terribly urgent. Without that the future of our children suffers.

Our overall vision is vast and noble. We appreciate that it will take time. With this in mind we have recently put forward some incremental plans for economic development that are capable of immediate realization – with government cooperation. These proposals are not for consultants' studies and pie-in-the-sky dreams. They are hard headed and profitable opportunities that will put our people to work right away and bring more wealth to all of the residents of our traditional territories, Gitksan and others.

The reaction of governments to date has been that funding such projects, even by way of loans, would cause problems, would create precedents.

We say that the very definition of progress is the creation of precedents.

We say that the precedent of the usual approach to Indian affairs by governments has in fact been tragic. Every man, woman and child in Canada, on the average, kicks in about \$25 per month to support the failed Indian system. It is time for new ways.

We are business people. We have managerial and administrative capacity. We seek to put these hopes and skills to work. But we need the help of the governments that up until now have busied themselves with administering poverty for the Gitksan and trucking literally billions of dollars of resources out of our territories with nothing left for us.

We ask the people of Canada to demand of the politicians in this campaign, "What do you say about this? Here is a group that has legal rights, that has been oppressed, that has immediate tangible proposals and wants to help itself. Will you listen to them?"

We will give an immediate and in-depth briefing to any candidate and especially Leader who cares enough to ask for one.

And if we get such interest, we will say thank you.

We want to carry out the instruction of the Supreme Court requiring reconciliation with Canada. We do not want to be a burden on the Crown and we do not want the Crown to be a burden on us. Now Canada must finally do its part.



For further information on the Gitksan, please contact Bev Clifton Percival at 250-842-6780, or refer to

www.gitksan.com