



GITKSAN CHIEFS' OFFICE

Media Release

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Gitksan Chiefs Urge Governments to establish a Special Prosecutors Office to Prosecute Crimes relating to Aboriginal People

Gitksan Territories: The Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs propose that the provincial and federal justice departments separately or jointly establish a Special Prosecutions Branch for the prosecution of crimes relating to Aboriginal people, and that the Branch employ native-speaking investigators (in the case of the Gitksan, from each clan) so that investigations can be done, if necessary, in the language spoken by the victims and accused persons.

The Branch should be given a mandate to prosecute all matters, from domestic assaults to racketeering. This mandate should specifically include investigating and prosecuting any allegations of wrong-doing within Indian & Northern Affairs Canada and aboriginal organizations.

The Branch should be given unrestricted authority to decide which cases would be dealt with by way of alternative measures and restorative justice procedures, and which would be prosecuted in the usual manner.

The Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs make this proposal because, in our view, there is no adequate legal mechanism for the prosecution of aboriginal or tribal government members that steal from their people, and our experience satisfies us that theft from public funds by elected chiefs, members of boards, and other leadership positions is commonplace. Unfortunately the allegations reflect badly on all aboriginal people, their governments, and dealings, which are usually honest and competent.

In this regard the media reports allegations of a Senior Aide to the Prime Ministers' Office having fraud convictions and APTN reports this same person to have been involved in some financial misconduct in water projects on various reserves. We have had water projects on our own reserves with similar allegations regarding consultants and INAC staff. As well, there are many bingo games and pyramid schemes where funds have been misappropriated for personal use, and there have been recent allegations of financial misuse of \$6.7 million in the regional DIA program, Skeena Native Economic Development Society in Terrace (SNEDS).

We also believe that the corruption which is allegedly so prevalent on our reserves could not happen without the knowledge and even complicity of officials in the Department of Indian Affairs, and urge governments to seriously address this important issue.

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