

## **Lheidli T'enneh Final Agreement**

**Premier Gordon Campbell**

**October 29, 2006**

### *Check against delivery*

I want to acknowledge the elders and all who have welcomed us here to the traditional territories of the Lheidli T'enneh people. It is a truly auspicious occasion for us and I am particularly pleased to see Grand Chief Ed John join us here today as well from the First Nations Leadership Council who has been such a positive force for change and improvement in the lives of first nations people across the province.

It is an honour to be here today as well with Minister Jim Prentice who has spent in his short time in his portfolio a great deal of time with us in British Columbia working to find a way that we can move ahead with a sense of confidence and excitement about our future.

Your mayor here in Prince George, Colin Kinsley, has been an admirable leader at the local level in truly building relationships and I know that what Prince George has done with the Lheidli T'enneh is a model for all communities across British Columbia. So, Colin, let me say thank you very much for the leadership you've shown here with your council. It's been exceptional.

And of course Chief Dominic Frederick and the elders of the Lheidli T'enneh band. The chief's commitment, his tenacity in searching for a solution is something that has characterized him throughout the process. I can't tell you what a privilege is to have been working with you. My colleagues, Shirley Bond, Pat Bell, John Rustad, Mike de Jong, and myself all reflect on the fact that it is because of your leadership that we are here today so thank you very much.

And of course, Steven Point, who is here as the chief commissioner of the BC Treaty Commission. The BC Treaty Commission has been here for 13 years. Steven has been the chair for almost 2 years and already we're initialling a treaty today. That's pretty good progress. Thank you very much, Steven, for your leadership.

In the Carrier language, the name Lheidli T'enneh means "people from the confluence of two rivers."

Since time beyond memory, they have lived, raised families, and shared stories here where the waters of the Nechako and the Fraser meet. Before those two rivers converge, the Nechako and the Fraser carved through bedrock into the deep history of our province, defying obstacles both natural and manmade, always seeking a way forward. And here their waters meet, merging into one, becoming something greater and stronger before they continue on their long journey together.

The path of those two rivers is in many ways mirrored by the path that brought us here today – a long difficult journey but one that found a way.

And now we stand with the Lheidli T'enneh at another confluence. Today, in this place, the past and the possible come together. And from here flows one future combining the proud history of the Lheidli T'enneh people and all the potential of generations yet to come.

It has taken over a decade and the treaty process to bring the Lheidli T'enneh and the federal and the provincial governments to this point. But in truth, the agreement being initialled today was generations in the making, or perhaps it is more accurate to say it was generations in delaying. For two centuries the history of relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in B.C. and indeed across Canada was one of denial. But, as we celebrate here today, we can say with confidence that in British Columbia the policy of denial is no more.

This process began long before we spoke of a new relationship with B.C.'s aboriginal people. But this agreement holds within all of the spirit, potential and hope of that new relationship. Let us not underestimate what it took to achieve this historic agreement today. Lheidli T'enneh, like all aboriginal people, have good reason and just cause not to trust. They have heard and accepted the promises of governments before and found them wanting, if not worthless. But still the leaders and elders of the Lheidli T'enneh came to the table willing to trust and determined to see that their trust is rewarded. You should know today, like your leaders, like your elders, I am determined to see that that trust is rewarded as well.

This has also been a challenge for governments. It's not always easy for governments to admit mistakes and harder still to assume the burden of the mistakes made in the past. But the burden of injustice done to aboriginal people has weighed too heavily on our province for too long. And none of us here, aboriginal or non-aboriginal, wish to pass on that burden to our children.

Instead, we want a province in which aboriginal people are just as likely to find a good job as their non-aboriginal co-workers. We want a province in which aboriginal children dream of their future and are just as likely to graduate as their non-aboriginal classmates. We want a province in which aboriginal elders live as long and as healthy lives as their non-aboriginal fellow citizens. We want a province in which the only true difference between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people is the rich diversity of our cultures – and that's a difference that we can be proud of and that we can embrace.

We are committed together to find a way forward, free of the burdens of past failures. And because of the leadership of the Lheidli T'enneh, their elders and their people, we have found a way.

This agreement is not just about making right the wrongs of our history. This agreement is about doing right for the future – and not just what is right for the Lheidli T'enneh but

what is right for all British Columbians and for all Canadians. We will all benefit from the certainty this agreement can bring for all of B.C.

This is not an agreement built just on redress and restitution. It is agreement built on respect, recognition and reconciliation – recognition of the rights that aboriginal people have always held and recognition, in the words that begin the new relationship document, that “We are all here to stay.”

I want to acknowledge the Lheidli T’enneh for being the first to reach this stage of the treaty process. It is not always easy to be first. There is honour in being first, but there’s also trepidation. There is pride, but there is hesitation. But our children deserve our mutual courage. This is a historic step we are taking today, as much for our children as for those who worked so long and hard to get us here. It has been a long journey.

I want to acknowledge the work of Jack Weisgerber. I want to acknowledge the work of Mike Harcourt and the government who established this treaty process. I want to acknowledge the work of Geoff Plant, the former Attorney General and minister responsible and Tom Christensen. I want to acknowledge the work of former Prime Minister Mulroney in establishing the treaty commission.

But, most importantly, I want to acknowledge the time, the effort, the energy and the commitment that we have seen from the Lheidli T’enneh people. They are the ones that carried this torch from 1993 through ‘til today in 2006. We are building a foundation. It is my hope that it is a strong foundation upon which we can build a future for all British Columbians, but most importantly for young Lheidli T’enneh first nations. We have come so far. The river of our progress now runs deep and clear and it can carry us steadily forward together.

I want to thank all of the negotiators, the province, the Lheidli T’enneh, from the federal government. These are difficult tasks that we set before them. I want to thank everyone for their goodwill, for without that goodwill we would not be able to be here today.

The words and pages of this final agreement are the result of countless hours of work by countless people over 13 years. We’re indebted to all of them for their tireless efforts and today I am pleased to see so many of you here with us to celebrate their success. Whatever else their lives hold for them, they should know and recognize that they have made history. They have shaped the future of the Lheidli T’enneh people, this province and this country and they’ve shaped it for the better.

While this ceremony marks a conclusion of sorts, we are also at the beginning of something today, something of substance, significance and strength and something we can pass down to our children with pride. On behalf of the legislature of British Columbia, let me say thank you for your commitment. Thank you for your time, for your effort and for your belief in the future of the Lheidli T’enneh people and the Province of British Columbia and the great country of Canada.