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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

### **FIRST NATIONS APPROVE HISTORIC LAND SETTLEMENT**

VICTORIA – The Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations have successfully ratified a proposed settlement that would resolve a reserve-based claim relating to a parcel of land in downtown Victoria, including the legislature lands, said Michael de Jong, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation today.

“I congratulate the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations for ratifying this agreement,” said de Jong. “The settlement agreement is a clear and tangible result of this government’s New Relationship with First Nations, which is built on mutual respect, recognition and reconciliation of Aboriginal rights and title.”

Last night, the Esquimalt and Songhees members voted on the settlement agreement. Of the 80 per cent of eligible Esquimalt members who cast ballots, 92 per cent voted in favour. In the case of the Songhees members, of the 66 per cent of eligible voters who cast a ballot, 94 per cent voted in favour.

On Nov. 18, 2006, the Province of British Columbia, Government of Canada, and the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations initialled the proposed settlement in Victoria.

This settlement relates to a lawsuit filed in 2001 which alleged that Canada and British Columbia breached certain duties owed to the First Nations. The claim alleges that the land was originally set aside as an Indian reserve in 1854 by Governor James Douglas, who then took it back for the legislature site without obtaining a surrender of the reserve.

The Government of Canada will need to ratify the agreement before it can come into effect. Once ratified, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations will equally share a financial settlement of \$31.5 million and can purchase land out of the settlement funds. The settlement will provide for a full and final resolution of this litigation without any admissions of fact or liability.

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Media contact: Deborah Bowman  
Communications Director  
Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation  
250 953-3211  
250 213-3489 (cell)

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