

AN ADDRESS
ON THE
CEREMONIAL COMMENCEMENT OF LAND CLAIM NEGOTIATIONS
BY
THE HONOURABLE ALLAN WILLIAMS
MINISTER OF LABOUR
BRITISH COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
TO THE
NISHGA TRIBAL COUNCIL
AND THE
NISHGA PEOPLE OF THE NASS VALLEY
AT
NEW AIYANSH, B.C.
JANUARY 12, 1976
(Video Tape Transcription)

MR. PRESIDENT, HEREDITARY CHIEFS AND ELDERS, COUNCILLORS, YOUR GRACE, MR. MINISTER, MADAM MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE NISHGA PEOPLE.

THE LETTER OF INVITATION FROM YOUR DISTINGUISHED PRESIDENT RECEIVED AFTER THE DECEMBER ELEVENTH ELECTION, ASKED THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA WHICH IT IS MY PLEASURE TO REPRESENT, TO COME AS A THIRD PARTY IN THE LAND SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS; AND THE FACT THAT I AM IN ATTENDANCE HERE TODAY, IS TO BE REGARDED AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE WISH OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE AS A FULL AND NECESSARY PARTICIPANT IN THESE DISCUSSIONS-DISCUSSIONS WHICH I MIGHT SAY, HAVE FOR TOO LONG BEEN DEFERRED. I HAVE TODAY LEARNED MUCH ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS, YOUR DESIRES, AND THE ATTITUDES WHICH YOU HOLD TOWARDS THE DISCUSSIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. I BELIEVE THAT FOR TOO LONG WE HAVE BEEN GUARDED IN OUR APPROACH TO THOSE MATTERS IN WHICH WE HAVE A MUTUAL INTEREST. I TRUST THAT THE DISCUSSIONS STARTING NOW, WILL BE CONDUCTED WITH FRANKNESS AND CANDOR, AND IN THE FULL RECOGNITION THAT THE SOLUTIONS WE SEEK, WILL BE BENEFICIAL, NOT ONLY TO THE NISHGA PEOPLE, BUT FOR ALL OF THE PEOPLE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND CANADA AS WELL. I ALSO TRUST THAT THE DELAYS IN ARRIVING AT THIS RECOGNITION OF COMMON INTEREST WILL NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT WE MUST RETRACE THOSE PATHS WHICH HAVE BEEN WALKED BEFORE. THE NEED TO GO OVER OLD PATHS SHOULD BE LIMITED TO THE EXTENT THAT THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST WILL CONTRIBUTE IN A POSITIVE FASHION TO THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FUTURE. WE SET OUT TODAY IN A SPIRIT OF GOOD WILL, BUT AS WE EMBARK UPON OUR TASK, LET US DO SO IN THE FULL AWARENESS THAT THESE NEGOTIATIONS WILL PRESENT A

VARIETY OF PROBLEMS TO ALL OF THE PARTIES CONCERNED. THAT WILL MEAN IN TURN, THAT WE WILL BE FACED WITH DECISIONS WHICH INDIVIDUALLY, WE MAY FIND DIFFICULT TO MAKE, BUT IT WILL BE OUR WILLINGNESS TO PRESS FORWARD, TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS AND ALLOWANCES, THAT WILL DETERMINE THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS. THESE ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF ALL MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS. HOW ABLE WE ARE TO MAKE THOSE DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND HOW WILLING WE ARE TO MODIFY OUR POSITIONS IN HONOUR AND WITH DIGNITY WILL ILLUSTRATE OUR STRENGTH, NOT OUR WEAKNESS. I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT ON THE OCCASION OF THIS HISTORIC MEETING WITH THE NISHGA BAND, WHICH FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY HAS PUT FORWARD ITS CLAIM FOR RECOGNITION, TO REFER BRIEFLY TO THE OTHER NATIVE PEOPLES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, WHO ALSO HOLD BRIEFS FOR OUR CONSIDERATION. WHILE THEIR CONCERNS AND ASPIRATIONS MAY BE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE NISHGA PEOPLE, NONTHELESS THEY MERIT OUR FORTHRIGHT ATTENTION AND RESPONSE. I HOPE THEREFORE, THAT ALL THE OTHER NATIVE PEOPLES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA WILL REGARD THIS MEETING TODAY AS INDICATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE AND SENTIMENT TOWARDS THEM. UPON MY RETURN TO VICTORIA, IT WILL BE MY RESPONSIBILITY AND OBLIGATION, TO REPORT TO THE PREMIER AND TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ON THE PROCEEDINGS THAT HAVE TODAY TAKEN PLACE IN THIS ASSEMBLY. WE WILL THEN BEGIN TO ESTABLISH OUR PROCEDURES AND TO SET IN MOTION THE APPARATUS WHICH WILL GIVE EFFECT TO THE PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING AND WILL TRANSLATE INTO ACTION THE WORDS WHICH HAVE BEEN SPOKEN. LET US NOW BEGIN.