

Historic treaty 'means my baby has a future' Sweeping Island deal holds promise of better lives

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It's unlikely a gurgling five-month-old Jenniece will remember the Maa-Nulth First Nations initialing ceremony she witnessed while cuddled in her mother's arms.

But if the deal is ratified, and then made a treaty -- a process that is likely to take almost a year -- the ceremony yesterday could mark the day her life was changed.

"This deal means my baby has a future," said Jenniece's mother, Jennifer Hanson, who has three other children and is a member of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/'

Che:k'tles7et'h'. It is one of the five First Nations groups that negotiated under the umbrella Maa-Nulth First Nations.

"I hope [the agreement] will bring us more community development," Hanson said, adding she dreams her children will be able to live in Kyuquot their entire life.

Hanson simply expressed what more than a dozen speakers enthused about in a ceremony which, just like treaty negotiations throughout the province, went into overtime.

At the other end of the demographic divide, 75-year-old Barbara Touchie travelled from Ucluelet for the standing-room only event at the Fairmont Empress. "I always had the hope that I'd still be here when it happened," she said. "It means so much for me as an elder but even more for the future generation."

The deal -- covered in a 280-page document accompanied by a 520-page appendices and a 152-page book of maps -- represents 13 years of work depending on when one takes the first measure and, "in many cases a lifetime of work," said provincial Minister of Aboriginal Relations Mike de Jong.

While optimism and light-hearted banter flavoured the event, many speeches included a dusting of reality, noting that there remains a long road ahead before the deal is ratified.

Maa-nulth lead negotiator Gary Yabsley said "when we leave today we will face opposition from friends and family; within and outside of our communities. I can only imagine how painful this will be." But, he said, "life will be better" with the agreement that will transform law, economic, social and education systems.



CREDIT: Debra Brash, Times Colonist
James Nicolaye holds his great niece, five-month-old Jenniece, during a ceremony at which the Maa-Nulth treaty was signed yesterday.

Details of the sweeping agreement were announced Friday. It covers everything from land ownership to transfer of artifacts from museums, including the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

The financial package is estimated to be valued at \$320 million to \$500 million depending on how the land value is assessed. Other clauses cover hunting, fishing, forestry, taxation, education and governance rights.

Premier Gordon Campbell, who took time to hand out hundreds of certificates to First Nations members in the audience commemorating the event, said the agreement will give the Maa-nulth "the tools to become active participants in the economy. The benefits of this agreement will be felt throughout the region for generations to come."

Campbell said he understood that it hasn't been easy to set aside the past especially when trust has been betrayed. "Nothing inspires me more than your ability to trust one more time."

- More information on the agreement is available online at: maanulth.ca; gov.bc.ca/arr; and ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc/treapro/ston/nwdev/nwdev_e.html

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