



Parliament next stop for Maa-nulth First Nations

PORT ALBERNI, BC, April 9 /CNW/ - The signing ceremony today launches the Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement into Parliament, the final stop on the road to recognition and the beginning of reconciliation.

"We believe quick passage of the Maa-nulth treaty in Parliament would be an important signal to First Nations and all British Columbians that the Government of Canada stands behind the commitment it made to treaty making in BC more than 15 years ago," said Chief Commissioner Sophie Pierre, who attended the ceremony at Athletic Hall along with Commissioner Dave Haggard.

The Treaty Commission wants every effort made to see the legislation formalizing the treaty make its way through Parliament and the Senate at the earliest opportunity.

Minister Strahl has helped the cause of quick passage by signing the Maa-nulth Final Agreement within days of the final outstanding issues being cleared by the five First Nations. Huu-ay-aht First Nation had delayed signing the final agreement while it was involved in a court action against the federal government over the aboriginal right to sell fish.

Pierre said Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl underscored his government's commitment to treaties in celebrating with Tsawwassen First Nation the effective date of their treaty a week earlier and in the signing ceremony in Port Alberni today.

"The Treaty Commission wishes to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the parties to reaching this agreement, the first in the BC treaty process to be concluded with a large multi-First Nation group," said Pierre.

"I congratulate the Maa-nulth people for their vision and perseverance," said Pierre. "I know how difficult it is to maintain consensus and keep the focus on what is best for the collective."

Given the long struggle by these five First Nations - Huu-ay-aht, Kyoquot/Checklesah, Toquaht, Uchucklesah and Ucluelet -- to achieve the recognition of their rights and reconciliation with the Crown, Pierre said, "We should all do our utmost to ensure the Maa-nulth people receive the full benefit of the treaty as soon as humanly possible."

About the BC Treaty Commission

The Treaty Commission is the independent body responsible for overseeing treaty negotiations among the governments of Canada, BC and First Nations in BC. It has three roles: facilitation, funding, and public information and education.

Established in 1992, the Treaty Commission and six-stage treaty process are designed to advance treaty negotiations. The Treaty Commission comprises a provincial appointee, a federal appointee, two First Nations Summit appointees and a chief commissioner chosen by agreement of all three parties. For more information about the BC Treaty Commission, please visit bctreaty.net.