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Ladysmith Chronicle

# Web Extra: Treaty groups and government need to wrap things up

By [Stephen Thomson - Ladysmith Chronicle](#)

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The lead negotiator for an alliance of local First Nation groups says he supports a call for the provincial and federal governments to focus more on reaching agreement at B.C. treaty tables.

Robert Morales, with the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, commented on a statement the B.C. Treaty Commission released last week that emphasizes the need to wrap up negotiations that have dragged on since the early 1990s.

"I think the public needs to be aware that a considerable amount of taxpayer dollars is being invested to try and resolve these issues, to try and bring certainty to British Columbia, and government continues to hold on to old concepts that have been eclipsed by Supreme Court of Canada decisions, and yet they refuse to bring their policies in line with the law," Morales said.

In a release, Sophie Pierre, chief commissioner of the B.C. Treaty Commission, urges all sides to work toward successful negotiations.

"The governments of British Columbia and Canada must reaffirm their commitment to treaty making and re-examine their mandates in order to complete treaties," Pierre says.

“First Nations need to resolve territorial issues to remove the risk and uncertainty that prevents the completion of treaties.”

An Indian and North Affairs Canada spokeswoman said that progress is being made with the treaty negotiations. Margot Geduld highlighted government efforts to finalize a treaty with the Tsawwassen First Nation and get closer to a final agreement with the Maa-nulth First Nations.

“Certainly Canada agrees that a revitalization of the treaty process is warranted and we welcome the B.C. Treaty Commission’s suggestions. We are working on a number of initiatives that are consistent with some of the [B.C. Treaty Commission’s] recommendations,” she said.

In British Columbia there are 60 First Nation groups participating in the treaty process, which started in 1992. The Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group — which represents six local First Nation groups including the Stz’uminus First Nation — is among the 43 at stage four of the six-stage process.

“Certainly at the Hul’qumi’num treaty table we are experiencing the issues that the chief commissioner Sophie Pierre is talking about — the barriers and the inability to make progress because of federal and provincial government policies and mandates that have not been able make any progress in getting movement on them. We certainly would support the comments that the chief commissioner has made,” Morales said.

He questioned the commitment of the government representatives, noting that the Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group talks have stalled due to a refusal to negotiate on the 1884 E&N land grant, which includes around 260,000 hectares claimed as traditional First Nation territory.

In an effort to push forward on the issue, the Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group lodged a human rights complaint around a year ago with a commission based in Washington, D.C. Morales said the Inter-American Commission

on Human Rights is expected to rule on the admissibility of the petition in the coming weeks.

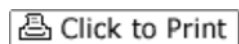
Meanwhile, he said the communities he represents are committed to seeing the treaty process through.

“I think the fact that we are borrowing money to keep the process going is an indication of our commitment. The communities want a resolution to this issue. The membership want a resolution to these issues but they are unable to agree with the position that government’s bringing to the table. When the government takes a hardline position and says, ‘This is our bottom line and we’re not prepared to move,’ then it really closes off any prospect of a real negotiation,” he said.

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