

Expect blockades

Delay of ferry first shot of a campaign, treaty group warns

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People can expect more blockades on Island roads and waterways, says Robert Morales, Chief Negotiator for the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, following the 40-minute delay of a ferry sailing out of Nanaimo on Saturday by six First Nations canoes.

"It's a campaign," Morales said Monday.

The 60 First Nations groups making up the Unity Protocol, he said, are committed to forcing provincial and federal governments to address their issues with the treaty process.

The Unity Protocol was formed in October 2006 after a number of First Nations groups became frustrated with what they say is the B.C. and Canadian governments' unwillingness to even discuss six items of critical importance.

The issues are: certainty, constitutional status of lands, fiscal relations, allocation and co-management of fisheries resources, co-management of lands and resources, and governance.

The Unity Protocol wants to sit down as a united group and hammer out these issues, then return to their individual tables for further discussion.

Morales and the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, which represents Cowichan Tribes, the Penelakut Tribe, and the Halalt, Chemainus, Lake Cowichan, and Lyackson First Nations, are among the founding members of the Unity Protocol.

Since the formation of the Protocol, Morales said, they haven't had any indication from the governments that they are willing to engage in such a process. "Frustration continues to rise," he said.

Sunday's blockade, conducted by Nanaimo's Snuneymuxw Nation, a member of the Protocol, was a day of cultural celebration, said Morales, and a show of solidarity and commitment.

"We don't accept the vision that they're trying to force on us," he said, of what the government is bringing to the negotiating tables. "Government's approach to treaty-making is very limited.

"How do you negotiate with somebody that just says no?"

In delaying the 12:30 sailing of the Queen of Coquitlam from Departure Bay, Morales said, they made a statement.

"We intend to continue these kinds of activities and to escalate if we can't get some movement," he said. "We simply will not be put into a position where we continue to incur huge amounts of debt with no willingness on the other side to explore options."

Along with possible blockades on roads and water, Morales said, the campaign includes sending letters and postcards to politicians, urging support and action.

It also includes getting information out to the public, something that the more showy actions can help to do, he said.

"It certainly draws attention to the issue," he said. "People need to be aware."

Morales said he doesn't think the Treaty process is dead.

On the contrary, he said, this could be the start of real negotiations between the two parties.

The ball is now in the governments' court, Morales said.

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