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## **OAS Human Rights Commission to hear landmark Canadian case**

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Posted by: **Craig Benjamin**

On October 28, the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) will hear a potentially ground-breaking human rights case brought by six British Columbia First Nations.

The case concerns the 1884 expropriation of over 237,000 hectares of resource-rich land from the traditional territories of the Hul'qumi'num peoples. Almost all that land is now in the hands of three major forestry development companies, TimberWest Forest Corporation, Hancock Timber Resource Group and Island Timberlands.

The complaint filed by the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group (HTG) alleges that Canada has violated international human rights norms by refusing to negotiate for any form of redress for the expropriated lands and by failing to protect Hul'qumi'num interests while the dispute remains unresolved.

Robert A. Williams, Jr. who is representing HTG as lead counsel, said in a press release this week that a positive decision "will vindicate the position of First Nations leaders and communities throughout Canada that the Comprehensive Land Claims Policy needs to be scrapped in favor of a process that complies with international human rights standards for the recognition and protection of First Nations' peoples in their ancestral lands."

The press release also notes that the Commission has already established an important international law precedent in ruling HTG's case admissible, over Canada's strenuous objections, on the grounds that available means to resolve the dispute in Canada, particularly the British Columbia Treaty Commission process, fell below international standards of justice.

Amnesty International has joined over a dozen Canadian First Nations governments and organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), in filing briefs in support of HTG.