

Opponents of BC treaties rally in Victoria as historic accord set for ratification

15 October 2007

The Canadian Press

VICTORIA - Several hundred First Nations demonstrators rallied outside the Royal B.C. Museum on Monday to protest the Tsawwassen treaty, which was being debated in the B.C. legislature later in the day.

Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, said aboriginal people from across the province are opposed to the treaty process.

Phillip said it is designed to extinguish aboriginal title and terminate aboriginal rights just to provide certainty for business and industry.

He said the groups he represents will return to Victoria as often as required to protest the treaty process.

They are prepared to "march to the gates of the Olympic city" to make their point, Phillip said.

The Tsawwassen treaty, which covers an area south of Vancouver, is the first to be negotiated and ratified under the B.C. treaty process begun in the early 1990s and the first treaty involving an urban First Nation.

Protester Tom Sampson of the Sencot'en Alliance said he is an old man who is getting tired of fighting

"We oppose the way this government has coerced these tribes to enter the treaty process by using money to move them into a position where they can't say no because most of our tribes, our people, across the country and especially in B.C. we are still living in Third World conditions," Sampson said.

Robert Morales, chief negotiator with the Hulquminum treaty group and with the Unity Protocol Group, representing about 35,000 aboriginals, said the "cookie-cutter" approach to treaty negotiation is unacceptable