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Cowichan News Leader Pictorial

# Tribunal to hear case charging Canadian human rights violations

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The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group is celebrating a victory in its case before an international human rights tribunal.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has ruled HTG's petition admissible, meaning the treaty group can move forward with its case against Canada.

"The ruling is quite significant, as it is the first time that the Organization of American States has admitted a case against Canada for human rights violations of its aboriginal people," said Brian Thom, a negotiator with HTG.

The treaty group's case stems from the 1884 E&N Railway Grant, which privatized the southeast coast of Vancouver Island and consequently has held up treaty talks.

As reported previously in the News Leader Pictorial, HTG appealed to the IACHR during a hearing in Washington, D.C. last year.

A second hearing on admissibility was held in March, and yesterday the international body released its findings to HTG and Canada.

"They did find Hul'qumi'num's case admissible, and they made some very strong

statements in (the report released Monday) about the inadequacy of the B.C. treaty process, the inadequacy of the courts in Canada, the inadequacy of government processes — like the ones that supposedly protect archeological sites — and the inadequacy of all these things to deal with Hul’qumi’num rights to property and culture,” said Thom.

“It’s a very big decision.”

The 15-page report clears the way for another hearing in Washington, where HTG will further its case and speak to specific issues around the E&N privatization of lands.

“It’s pretty amazing,” said Thom. “There were a lot of people who doubted this, people who said, ‘Human rights in Canada? There couldn’t possibly be violations.’ And that’s simply not true. So now we’re hoping to bring the world’s focus onto this.”

For more on this story, pick up a copy of Friday’s News Leader Pictorial.

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