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Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial

HTG makes the most of meeting with international commission

By Krista Siefken - Cowichan News Leader and Pictorial

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The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group had just 30 minutes in front of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, but chief negotiator Robert Morales thinks the group used its time wisely.

"I think it was a good experience for us to have been there, a good opportunity to get a feel of how the commission operates, and I think our presentation went well," Morales told the News Leader Pictorial Thursday.

The treaty group, which represents Cowichan Tribes and five other local bands, took its concerns regarding land and treaty negotiations to the international tribunal in Washington, D.C.

The group wants to see a resolution to its concern regarding the Hul'qumi'num traditional territory, which was taken over for use by the E&N rail line without permission from, or compensation, for the First Nations people. Another issue is stalled treaty negotiations.

The group met with the commission at 6 p.m. Tuesday when its legal counsel, Robert Williams Jr. and Cowichan elder Arvid Charlie, spoke to make a case against the Canadian government.

"Now we have to wait and Canada will have an opportunity to reply, but they're not going to take that opportunity until the March sitting," added Morales. "They had four (lawyers) there, including two from the department of justice and one from the attorney general of British Columbia, but they didn't say anything at all."

The News Leader Pictorial's calls for comment to the Canadian government were not returned.

Charlie, meanwhile, was also Cowichan Tribes' acting chief during the hearing, as Chief Lydia Hwitsum was unable to attend.

Charlie had just a handful of minutes to make his case on the importance of Hul'qumi'num land, language and culture during the hearing.

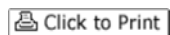
"Those seven minutes turned out to be pretty short," Charlie said. "I had to cut a lot out, so it's hard for me to be happy about it because it was so short, but according to the lawyers I did a good job."

And while the hearing is over, the treaty group's work is far from finished.

"We will be having what they call amicus curiae briefs (supporting statements) filed, which include First Nations (individuals) or First Nations organizations that are supportive," explained Morales. "They're able to file submissions, so we will likely be looking for other First Nations affected by the E&N, and then we just have to wait for Canada to reply."

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