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Ladysmith Chronicle

## First Nations group allowed to pursue rights complaint



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chief negotiator

A group of local First Nations has gained more ground in its fight over land negotiations after an international human rights body ruled it will further consider complaints lodged against Canada.

The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group argues 270,000 hectares of traditional territory was illegally confiscated from its members, including Stz'uminus First Nation and Halalt First Nation.

Through the 1884 E&N land grant to Ladysmith's founder James Dunsmuir, the disputed territory fell into private hands and has since become a sticking point in treaty negotiations.

Last week it was announced that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, based in Washington, D.C., has ruled the HTG's petition is admissible, opening the door for the process to continue despite opposition from the Canadian government.

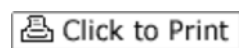
"I think it's very significant in terms of an independent international body who has indicated that they are satisfied that the existing treaty process is not effective and that the domestic court system is not likely to be effective to deal with this issue for the Hul'qumi'num people," said Robert Morales, chief HTG negotiator.

Asked about the ruling, an Indian and Northern Affairs Canada spokeswoman echoed previous comments that the government stands by the treaty process.

"Certainly the Government of Canada believes that the best way to resolve outstanding land claims is through negotiated settlements," Margot Geduld said.

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