

## Natives to take human-rights protest to U.S. commission

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Times Colonist

*Monday, October 27, 2008*

Half a dozen chiefs from a group representing First Nations across the Island will be in Washington, D.C., tomorrow, arguing for a hearing by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The commission is the human-rights arm of the Organization of American States, and the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group has filed a formal complaint against Canada, saying that human rights to property are being violated and ignored.

At the heart of the complaint is the 1884 E&N Railway grant, which the bands claim turned most of Hul'qumi'num territory into private lands without their consent.

The grant took in almost 70 per cent of their traditional territory, says a paper prepared by lawyer Sarah Morales.

"These grants were made without prior consultation with the Hul'qumi'num and without considering their property rights or interests in their traditional territory. No offer of restitution, for example return of lands or replacement of lands, or payment of restitution has ever been made by Canada," she wrote.

The issue of the E&N lands has come to a head because the treaty group has been told the lands are not on the table at the B.C. treaty process.

There is also massive urbanization in the area "with little or no First Nations involvement" and the treaty group wants real estate development suspended until there is a shared decision-making process.

The commission will look at the admissibility of the Hul'qumi'num application.

Canada is arguing that it is not admissible because the issue has not gone through domestic courts.

The treaty group represents 6,200 members of the Chemainus First Nation, Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation and Penelakut Tribe.

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