



PRESS RELEASE

Paused Land Act Amendments a Missed Opportunity to Implement UNDRIP

(Moberly Lake, B.C., Treaty 8 Territory, Feb 29, 2024) Recent negative reactions to the Province of BC's proposed *Land Act* amendments cause us great concern and frustration. After working diligently with the province and stakeholders, it is disheartening to learn that work on the amendments has been paused.

In 2019, MLAs of every party in the provincial legislature unanimously passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (Declaration Act). The *Declaration Act* affirms the application of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) to the laws of British Columbia. Central to UNDRIP and reconciliation is the recognition that Indigenous Peoples must have the right to participate in decisions affecting our rights. The Declaration Act provides for the use of decision-making agreements as the most effective mechanism for our participation in these types of decisions.

These proposed amendments represent a small step for British Columbians in fulfilling the commitments in the Declaration Act: to enable the province to negotiate decision-making agreements with Indigenous governments under the *Land Act* in the future.

Contrary to negative commentary from opposition parties and some media critics, the proposed amendments would not alter the existing land tenure system in British Columbia. There would be no impact on the public's ability to access Crown land. Rather, the proposed amendments make space for the recognition and implementation of Indigenous governance on matters that affect our rights, creating opportunities for more local and relevant decision-making.

Unfortunately, the province failed to effectively manage the public engagement and communication process for the *Land Act* amendments. This failure allowed space for opportunists to spread misinformation, generate fear and promote conspiracy theories. Some elected representatives in northeastern BC filled their social media channels with misinformation and racist messages for political gain, at the expense of the goals of the Declaration Act which their party supported in 2019. These words have consequences. Our Treaty 8 community members and leadership face increased hostility and racist backlash from people who believe the misinformation about the proposed amendments.

The proposed amendments, and the implementation of the Declaration Act are opportunities to build bridges and not walls between our Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous communities. We call on local representatives and political leaders to foster positive relationships and reject 'easy' points some seek to score by fuelling distrust with misinformation.

We all benefit from reconciliation. We have committed to doing this hard work, and invite you - British Columbians - to work with us to realize the shared benefits that the Declaration Act promises.

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