



For Immediate Release

January 24, 2008

First Nations Develop Province-Wide Action Plans

Westbank, BC – Seventy chiefs, lawyers and advisors representing over forty First Nations emerged from two days of intense strategic planning on implementing aboriginal rights and title at the Sensusyusten Community Centre at Westbank First Nation. This meeting is a prelude to a larger gathering that will be co-hosted by Westbank First Nation and the Tsilhqot'in National Government on March 12-13, 2008. The First Nations confirmed their support for the historic Tsilhqot'in court decision which determined that the Tsilhqot'in Nation have aboriginal title to 2,000 square kilometers and made a finding of aboriginal rights over all the territory identified by the Tsilhqot'in. The area where aboriginal title was proved represented over 50% of territory identified by the Tsilhqot'in. This is in marked contrast to government offers of settlement of aboriginal title which generally represents 5% of territory claimed by a First Nation. The Westbank meeting focused on action plans including litigation and direct action to force government to participate in honourable negotiations based on recognition and implementation of rights and title for all First Nations in BC.

Robert Morales, Chair of the First Nation Chief Negotiators stated: "Citizens and industry in the public must be aware that the governments are not negotiating Treaties in good faith. Canada and British Columbia come to the table with bureaucratic small-minded, take-it-or-leave-it negotiation mandates that ignore leading court rulings on aboriginal rights and title. Everyone needs to understand that the government is playing Russian roulette with the economy and future of the Province."

After two years of efforts, First Nations in B.C. have finally secured a commitment from Canada and British Columbia to meet at a common province-wide table. First Nations expect that key areas that have blocked conclusion of honourable treaties will now be looked at from a recognition of rights perspective consistent with court rulings.

Westbank Chief Robert Louie, who hosted the strategic planning session stated: "The governments must respect the rule of law. We will no longer accept repeatedly proving our rights and title in court only to have the governments ignore them in negotiations."