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**For Immediate Release**

## **Radical revamp of environmental reviews needed or mines and other major projects face costly delays, First Nations warn**

VANCOUVER – The provincial and federal governments are right to criticize the current environmental review processes, but misguided if they think the reviews can be streamlined without significant changes that address Aboriginal concerns, First Nations leaders said today.

“There is no question that separate provincial and federal environmental reviews result in costly and potentially unnecessary delays,” said Grand Chief Ed John of the BC First Nations Summit. “But if government or industries believe that two flawed processes can simply be replaced by one bad one, they are mistaken.”

Grand Chief John and other First Nation leaders expressed surprise at recent news that Ottawa has granted federal Environment Minister Jim Prentice authority to circumvent full assessments of controversial projects such as major mines and energy projects. Grand Chief John further states, “this unilateral decision is not a constructive step forward and certainly does not respect the rule of law on Indigenous issues. Given the emerging state of the law –in Canada and internationally—it is important for governments to recognize the legitimacy of these rights and to act within a framework of implementing them.”

“This is an arrogant and dangerous step that will completely undermine efforts to build new, productive relations with First Nations,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. “The provincial and federal governments ought to know by now that many of the lengthy delays in proposed mines and other projects are tied to inadequate environmental review processes that utterly fail to address the unextinguished Indigenous land title, rights and interests of our Peoples.”

Fred Sam, chief of the Nak’azdli First Nation, echoed Phillips’ concerns.

“Our nation would not have recently filed a petition in BC Supreme Court opposing the proposed Mt. Milligan copper and gold mine north of Fort St. James had there been a strong environmental review process in place. Our concerns about this proposed project were never adequately addressed through the assessment process and we were never offered a meaningful position at the decision-making table,” Sam said.

“The Council is proposing a completely revamped environmental assessment process that has been endorsed by the BC Chiefs via resolution – this proposal is independent from government, has mandatory First Nation participation, is transparent for all parties, and results in sustainable and accountable projects,” says Dave Porter, CEO of the BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council.

“By all means, let’s end unnecessary duplication of work,” Porter says. “But any streamlined environmental review process that fails to address First Nations rights and interests is a non-starter and will only delay project start-ups. Let’s get everyone to the table to find a workable solution.”

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