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JOINT STATEMENT FROM LEADERS OF THE FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT, BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS AND THE UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

In 2005, the provincial government and First Nations entered into a positive era of co-operation, called the New Relationship. At the core of this relationship was a commitment to recognize Aboriginal title and rights, to respect each other's laws and responsibilities, and to reconcile both Aboriginal and Crown titles and jurisdictions.

Since the New Relationship began we have worked honourably, thoughtfully and collaboratively through many issues, mindful and hopeful that we would reach a moment where our rights would be recognized in law.

In the 2009 Speech from the Throne, read by Lieutenant Governor Steven L. Point (Xwě li qwěi tēl), the government promised to introduce recognition and reconciliation legislation that will "further the implementation of the New Relationship" and acknowledge that "Indigenous People have long lived throughout British Columbia and that this fact does not require proof."

The moment is upon us. In the weeks ahead we expect the government will fulfill its commitment by introducing legislation that recognizes Aboriginal title within our traditional territories and affirms our right to share the benefits and revenues that the resources in these territories can provide.

This is an historic step forward for our people. It represents the culmination of generations of struggle since the day that James Douglas unilaterally declared, 150 years ago, that "all the lands in British Columbia, and all the Mines and Minerals therein, belong to the Crown in fee".

By moving away from the systemic, institutionalized denial of Aboriginal rights to full recognition of those rights in law, our elders will not have to be dragged into courtrooms to prove our existence or strength of claim. By no longer questioning the strength of our claims, precious time and resources can now be dedicated to the real tasks at hand: creating true independence in our territories; investing in our youth, our communities, and in our future; developing true partnerships between First Nations communities and all British Columbians.

The legislation will also create a greater degree of certainty for business activity in the province. It will provide for more collaborative, structured and, better decision making with regard to planning, management and tenuring decisions over lands and resources. We are confident it will help create lasting, respectful, mutually beneficial relationships throughout our province.

Importantly, the legislation represents an achievement for all British Columbians. While First Nations peoples know that our rights, inherited from our ancestors, are indisputable, we also know that we are all here to stay. We have to create a new path to move forward together. We must act on the opportunities this legislation will provide. As one chapter closes another one opens, and it is up to all of us to make the future brighter than the past.