

## FIRST NATIONS UNITY PROTOCOL NEWS RELEASE

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### **AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT: UNITY FIRST NATIONS CALL FOR MANDATE CHANGES**

The 46 First Nations that signed the Unity Protocol are calling on the federal and provincial governments to take action on barriers to treaty negotiations cited in the recent report from the Auditors General of Canada and BC. The Unity First Nations support many of the key findings of the federal Auditor General such as a more flexible process that focuses on signing treaties not ensuring that the process adheres to existing mandates of the many departments involved.

“This is one of the key points raised by many First Nations and is the number one barrier to getting treaties done in BC”, said Robert Morales, Hul’qumi’num Chief Negotiator and Chair of the First Nations Summit Chief Negotiators. “The courts have ordered the governments to negotiate based on reconciliation but instead they come to the table with a long list of bottom-line positions created by various ministries and agencies with no meaningful involvement of First Nations. These are called treaty negotiations but inflexible government mandates leave no room to negotiate in most areas,” added Morales.

First Nations emphasize they are not the ones causing delays in the process and point to the fact that most First Nations have to borrow millions of dollars to participate in the negotiations because they have limited land bases to generate revenues to fund their own participation.

“We are not sitting around trying to find ways to drag out the negotiations so we can go deeper and deeper into debt”, commented Morales. “These treaty negotiation loans hang over all of our heads and may cause some First Nations to abandon negotiations rather than accumulate more debt. We all want to get treaties done as soon as possible but we can’t recommend bad treaties to our communities,” said Morales.

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The 46 First Nations that signed the Unity Protocol represent 22,760 First Nation people and have sent proposals to the federal and provincial ministers for a joint table process to address the barriers to treaties in six key areas. The Unity First Nations are developing discussion papers for each of these barriers and will be releasing them over the next two months.

#### **For more information, please contact:**

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