



SPEAKING NOTES FOR MITCH STEVENS  
PRESIDENT  
NISGA'A LISIMS GOVERNMENT  
OTTAWA  
JANUARY 24, 2012

*INTRODUCTION*

- As most of you know – now almost 12 years since our Nation, together with Canada and British Columbia, entered into the first modern treaty in British Columbia.
- We are proud of our Treaty, and we are proud that by entering into the Treaty the Nisga'a Nation was able to enter Canada.

*ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and IMPLEMENTATION*

- The Nisga'a Treaty has many components – it sets out our constitutionally protected rights to Nisga'a Government, to our lands, to our resources, and many other matters.
- Our Treaty, like other modern treaties, is the key to the economic development and prosperity of our Nation. It enables us to take many of the steps that are necessary to bring about an end to the sorry legacy of the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* no longer applies to the Nisga'a Nation.
- But at the same time, in order for our Treaty to truly fulfil its potential, all parties must have the same commitment to its implementation and the fulfilment of its objectives as we do. Regrettably, this has not turned out to be the case on the part of the government of Canada.
- By and large, the government of Canada's approach to treaty implementation has been no more than to fulfill each treaty's narrow, legal obligations. But even then, whether through indifference or design, the Government has often failed to implement even its specific obligations. The government of Canada has appeared to be generally unconcerned with working to achieve the overall broad objectives of the entire agreements.

## *A NEW IMPLEMENTATION POLICY*

- Together with all other modern Treaty groups in Canada we have called for a new federal implementation policy. So far those efforts have been in vain. But we have not given up.
- One immediate step that could be taken would be for the government of Canada to finally recognize what we are all so aware of – the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is simply not capable of ensuring that our Treaties are properly implemented. Our Treaties are with the Crown, not the Department – but other departments continue to ignore or belittle them. Even AANO's Deputy Minister testified to the Senate that, in respect of fulfilling our Treaties, his department could do little more than “haggle” with the other departments.
- In our view, the statutory provisions that make the department responsible for the implementation of our agreements must be augmented by similar provisions in the Acts of all of the other departments whose activities touch on or are affected by our Treaties. That simple step would demonstrate an understanding that our Treaty is with the Crown, and it would require the entire government to treat the Crown's constitutional obligations seriously.

## *CONCLUSION*

- In our view, the best, most effective economic initiative that could be taken by the government of Canada – the best jobs initiative it could adopt – would be to focus on implementation of the Crown's promises, and to thereby provide real economic opportunities. There is no greater untapped resource in Canada than the energy, hopes and dreams of our people. It is time to unleash that resource.
- Canada is in a unique position, through you and your political party we have a majority government that can make these decisions in the best economic interest of our country.