

Sayt-K'ílim-Goot / one heart, one path, one nation



Nisga'a Lisims Government

T 250 633 3000 / F 250 633 2367
TF 1 866 633 0888
PO Box 231 / 2000 Lisims Dr
New Aiyansh BC / Canada V0J 1A0
NISGAANATION.CA

For Immediate Release

Nisga'a Nation delegation visits the National Museum of Scotland to begin discussions around repatriation of stolen memorial pole

Historic meeting presents opportunity for the museum to take first step towards reconciliation

AUG. 9, 2022 (EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND) — A delegation from the **Nisga'a Nation** from British Columbia, Canada, will visit with staff from the **National Museum of Scotland** this month to begin discussions around repatriating a **Nisga'a memorial totem pole**. The pole was stolen in 1929 by colonial ethnographer Marius Barbeau, who later sold it to the museum. The **Aug. 22** meeting will be the first in-person meeting between the museum and members of the Nisga'a Nation. The visiting delegation will be comprised of three members of the House of Ni'isjoohl — **Sim'oogit Ni'isjoohl (Chief Earl Stephens)**, **Noxs Ts'aawit (Dr. Amy Parent)**, and **Shawna McKay** — and other witnesses from the Nation.

"This will be the first time in living memory that members of the House of Nis'sjoohl will be able to see the memorial pole with our own eyes," says Chief Earl Stephens. "This visit will be deeply emotional for us all."

Amy Parent, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Education and Governance at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, adds: "The pole is a priceless belonging that our respected hereditary leaders have aptly called a cultural treasure. It tells the relationship of our House to the land and to our People. To have had it taken from us is to have removed a piece of our cultural identity and an integral part of the story of our nationhood."

The House of Ni'isjoohl is one of approximately 50 houses within the Nisga'a Nation. The Nisga'a memorial pole, also known as the Ni'isjoohl memorial pole, is a house pole that was carved and erected in the 1860s. The pole tells the story of Ts'wawit, a warrior who was next in line to be chief before he was killed in a conflict with a neighbouring Nation. The house pole, like others carved in the Nisga'a tradition, represents a chapter of the Peoples' cultural sovereignty, and is a living constitutional and visual record. The pole holds significant knowledge within its carvings, and can serve as a form of curriculum for the next generation to learn a Nisga'a way of life through oral history.

Barbeau acquired the pole in 1929, during a period in which the unethical and illegal collecting of Indigenous belongings by settlers and anthropologists was common in Canada. The pole was taken without the consent of the House of Ni'isjoohl, during a period when the Nisga'a Peoples were away from their villages for the annual hunting, fishing, and food harvesting season.

"The repatriation of the Ni'isjoohl house pole is one step the National Museum of Scotland can take towards reconciliation through concrete action," says Parent. "The United Kingdom voted to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and this would be a historic and vital act toward the implementation of that resolution."

Article 12 of UNDRIP says that "States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples concerned."

Other items have previously been returned to the Nisga'a Nation through provisions of the Nisga'a Final Agreement, which was negotiated between the Nation, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada. In September 2010, more than 300 treasures were rightfully and legally returned from the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Royal BC Museum.

However, to date only one totem pole in Canada, the Haisla G'psgolox Pole, has ever been successfully repatriated from a European museum. If successful, the Nisga'a delegation's mission to repatriate the Ni'isjoohl house pole would be the second. Once repatriated, the pole will become part of a larger research project that aims to explore the philosophy and pedagogical practices of the Nisga'a carving tradition as a form of knowledge production and transmission.

Visit amyparent.ca to learn more about the house pole and the research project.

About Nisga'a Nation

Proud British Columbians and Canadians, Nisga'a citizens are responsible for building and maintaining our own institutions. The Nisga'a Nation is represented by Nisga'a Lisims Government (NLG) — a modern, forward-thinking administration based on traditional culture and values. Nisga'a Government has the authority to pass laws on a broad range of matters. At the same time, Nisga'a lawmaking authority is concurrent with federal and provincial authority. Designed to assure democracy, transparency, and accountability, Nisga'a Government is comprised of NLG, the four Nisga'a Village Governments, and three Urban Locals.

Press kit and photos

bit.ly/NisgaaRepatriation

Press contact

Ines Min

+1 604 440 0791

ines@inesmin.com