

Frustrated By Being Shut Out of Secret Land Negotiations ‘Canadians for Fairness and Transparency’ Launches in British Columbia

Chilcotin, BC: Residents, land-owners, ranchers, tourism operators and entire communities have begun an organized dialogue with each other across the Chilcotin region to address the unfair negotiation process taking place between the Federal and Provincial governments and the Tsilhqot'in First Nation that will have a huge impact on every Chilcotin resident's home and livelihood.

Despite hollow promises to engage residents ‘at the appropriate time’, community members are anxious to be heard and take an active role in the treaty process.

Petrus Rykes, President of the West Chilcotin Tourism Association, has been working with other concerned citizens across the Chilcotin region to organize impacted communities into a formal group, with the objective of engaging the Federal and Provincial governments to meaningfully address their concerns. They have formed a group called ‘Canadians for Fairness and Transparency’ and are launching a website (www.canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca) and fundraising campaign to continue to spread awareness of the unfair process that is taking place.

“The time to involve all impacted community members in these negotiations is now.” said Petrus Rykes. “They've had six years since the Tsilhqot'in Title Lands were created in 2014, and they've done absolutely nothing to address our concerns. There are hundreds of properties on the Title Lands that are impacted, but instead of dealing with the issues related to them, they've charged ahead with further negotiations aimed at ceding much larger territories to the Tsilhqot'in, and putting hundreds if not thousands more properties, businesses, and residents at risk of losing everything,” said Petrus Rykes.

Trusting that the federal government will engage residents at the ‘appropriate time’ is extremely difficult following years of hundreds of letters and emails being ignored by Federal Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Carolyn Bennett and other government Ministers, until recent media coverage aired concerns publicly and prompted a single meaningless response. The level of concern and fear being felt across the Chilcotin more than warrants engaging with all stakeholders as part of an inclusive and transparent process.

Substantial limitations on tourism and ranching operations have already been imposed as a result of the 2014 Title Agreement, threatening and in some cases destroying the viability of businesses, residences, and communities across the region, without one single opportunity to “consult” or be represented at the negotiation table.

“Many people across British Columbia don't realize that secret negotiations are taking place right now that will dictate what happens to the communities, businesses, residents, and families of central BC. Negotiations should take place in a spirit of cooperation, with appropriate representation and transparency so that the rights of all citizens are taken into account. We

support the objective of all Indigenous communities to right the wrongs of the past. However, we don't expect our governments to sell us out in the process.”

The name of the group is “Canadians for Fairness and Transparency” and the website can be found at: www.canadiansforfairnessandtransparency.ca

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