

Public statement
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Human rights groups and Indigenous peoples' organizations will closely monitor landmark international hearing into Canadian land rights case

On Friday, October 28, the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) will hold its first ever hearings into the violation of Indigenous land rights in Canada.

The case before Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concerns the 1884 expropriation of over 237,000 hectares of resource-rich land from the traditional territories of the Hul'qumi'num peoples on Vancouver Island. The Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group alleges that Canada has violated international human rights norms by refusing to negotiate for any form of redress for the expropriated lands, which are now mostly in the hands of large forestry companies, and by failing to protect Hul'qumi'num interests while the dispute remains unresolved .

More than a dozen Indigenous peoples' organizations and human rights groups have filed legal briefs in support of the Hul'qumi'num case.

Craig Benjamin, Campaigner for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples with Amnesty International Canada, said, "The case now before the Inter-American Commission highlights crucial issues of justice that affect not only the Hul'qumi'num people, but Indigenous peoples across Canada. The very fact that a respected international human rights body like the IACHR is investigating these issues should be a wake up call to the federal and provincial governments and to all Canadians."

In agreeing to hear the complaint, the Inter-American Commission ruled that the available mechanisms to resolve this dispute in Canada, whether through negotiation or the BC treaty process, are too onerous and too constrained in their protection of human rights to live up to the standards of international justice.

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) said, "Fair and timely resolution of land and resource disputes is essential for reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and for closing the unacceptable gap in standard of living facing so many Indigenous communities. We hope that the intervention of the international human rights body can be a catalyst for rethinking government policies and approaches that

have so blatantly failed Indigenous peoples and the cause of justice.”

“Canada cannot credibly demand that other states live up to international standards for the protection of human rights -- including the fundamental right to equality and non-discrimination -- while dismissing those same standards at home,” said Heather Neun of Lawyers Rights Watch Canada. “Our organizations will be closely monitoring this hearing and are prepared to campaign to make sure governments in Canada act on the Commission's findings.”

The hearing will be held at the Commission’s headquarters in Washington D.C. on October 28, 2011, at 9 am EST. The hearing will be webcast on the Commission's website.

This public statement was endorsed by:

Amnesty International Canada

Ancient Forest Alliance

Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

Ecotrust

First Nations Summit

Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Lawyer's Rights Watch Canada

Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

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