

# Day **One**

The Nisga'a Nation took its first steps as a self-governing entity on May 11, 2000. This date marked the first meeting of a transitional government, which guided the nation through the evolution from the Nisga'a Tribal Council to Nisga'a Lisims Government. Most significantly, it marked a peaceful and orderly transfer of authority that is a Canadian tradition.

The body responsible for considering and passing laws, the Wilp S'ayuukhl Nisga'a, elected its first speaker and deputy speaker. The government moved quickly to pass 18 pieces of legislation regarding lands, forest resources, fisheries, wildlife, and financial administration. The Nisga'a Administrative Review Board Act was another important piece of legislation passed that day. This act established a board which is responsible for reviewing decisions made by the Nisga'a government. Its mission is to ensure decisions affecting individuals are fair, and that the government remains accountable to its citizens.

In preparation for this historic day, the three governments worked toward a common goal. Canada, for its part, completed its ratification of the Nisga'a Treaty by passing the orders in Council (required for the coming into force of the Nisga'a Final Agreement Act). This federal legislation gives effect to, and provides the force of law for, the Nisga'a Treaty. Canada also completed the Licenses of Occupation and the Federal Settlement Legislation. The three parties finalised associated agreements, including: a Fiscal Financing Agreement, Own Source Revenue Agreement, and a Harvest Agreement. British Columbia recognised Nisga'a land title and achieved provincial legislative approval for

the Nisga'a Final Agreement. On May 11, 2000, Capital Transfer Payments of \$20.3 million from Canada and \$3.1 million from British Columbia were made to the Nisga'a Nation.

Prior to the Effective Date, Canada and British Columbia dealt with the four Nisga'a villages and the Nisga'a Tribal Council on an individual basis. As a result of the treaty, the federal and provincial governments now conduct business with the Nisga'a Nation through Nisga'a Lisims Government. This centralised, streamlined approach greatly increases efficiency.

#### **Governing a Nation**

The government of the Nisga'a Nation is composed of Nisga'a Lisims Government (NLG) and four Nisga'a Village Governments. The Nisga'a Nation acts through NLG and each village government acts through its Nisga'a Village Chief and Council in exercising its rights, powers and privileges, and in carrying out its duties, functions, and obligations. Nisga'a citizens who ordinarily reside within the three Nisga'a "Urban Local" areas (Terrace, Prince Rupert, and Vancouver) elect individuals to serve as representatives to NLG.

For countless generations, the Nisga'a have governed themselves according to Ayuukhl Nisga'a, the traditional laws and practices of the Nisga'a Nation. The Council of Elders — which is composed of the chairperson, chiefs, matriarchs, and respected Nisga'a elders — provides guidance and interpretation of the Ayuuk to the Nisga'a government. The Council of Elders is appointed by NLG in accordance with Nisga'a law.

The President, Chairperson, Secretary-Treasurer, and the Chairperson of the Council of Elders are elected at-large by the Nisga'a Nation and serve as the four Officers of NLG. The executive consists of all the Officers, the Chief Councillor of each Nisga'a Village Government, and one representative from each Nisga'a Urban Local. Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a includes every Officer of Nisga'a Lisims Government, the Chief Councillor and Councillors of each Nisga'a Village Government, and two representatives from each Nisga'a Urban Local.

During the reporting period, there were four sittings of Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a (May 11, September 13, November 14-15, and December 5). A total of 21 laws were passed of which two were statute amendment acts. All Nisga'a laws are publicly available on the NLG web site. The Nisga'a Nation also elected a Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and passed Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a rules of procedure.

#### **Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a (House of Laws)**

On September 14, 2000, Nisga'a Lisims Government opened its administration building to the Nisga'a people. NLG invited representatives from the governments of Canada, British Columbia, and surrounding municipalities to take part in the celebrations. This impressive new government building includes the legislative chamber, meeting rooms, offices, executive wing, and the office of the president. It is a monument to the persistence and patience of the Nisga'a people.

On November 16, 2000, NLG raised a new pts'aan (totem pole) called Goothl Lisims (the heart of the Nisga'a Nation). It stands in front of Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a to mark the dawn of a new era, and to welcome all to the seat of Nisga'a government.

#### **Electing Representatives**

On November 8, 2000, the Nisga'a Nation held its first election, fulfilling the treaty requirement to hold a general election six months after the Effective Date. This first election was an opportunity to observe Nisga'a democratic traditions in action. Many of the candidates created their own pamphlets, brochures, buttons, and radio ads to promote their candidacy and to clarify their position on the issues. NLG appointed a chief

electoral officer to guarantee that the election was conducted fairly, openly, and in accordance with all of the requirements of the Nisga'a Elections Act.

#### **Sharing Wisdom**

News of the Nisga'a Final Agreement has travelled far beyond the Nass Valley — across British Columbia, Canada, and around the world. Governments and aboriginal peoples are all watching the implementation of the treaty with keen interest. They are also seeking the advice of Nisga'a negotiators and government members.

Since the Effective Date, representatives of the Nisga'a Nation have given numerous presentations to interested parties on the treaty negotiation process and the contents of the Nisga'a Final Agreement. In addition, aboriginal groups from Taiwan, Australia, and Scandinavia have travelled to the Nass Valley to see Nisga'a government in action and to learn first-hand from the experience of the Nisga'a Nation.

#### **International Participation**

In April 2000, the international stature of the Nisga'a Nation reached a new height when representatives of the Nisga'a Nation, along with other Canadian participants, were invited to attend the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. The second of such conferences, the Summit of the Americas focussed on stimulating economic development between the northern and southern hemispheres. Nisga'a Lisims Government was a full participant with the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The Nisga'a exhibit was visited by a number of high ranking officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Canada, the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States, and numerous foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, and heads of missions from around the Americas.





