

Gwich'in Tribal Council responds to Auditor's General Report on Land Claims

INUVIK (February 10, 2004) – Fred Carmichael, President of the Gwich'in Tribal Council reaction to the recently released Auditor General's report on land claims. This report reviewed the implementation of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

In the report the Auditor General expressed concerns about the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND) effectiveness and accountability in implementing the two land claims. It was found that DIAND's chosen approach to implementation does not allow it to pursue the stated land claim objectives of economic self-sufficiency and capacity building in each agreement. In the case of the Gwich'in Agreement the Auditor General noted two examples of this. The first has to do with funding. In the land claim agreement, the Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC) is charged with fulfilling all the implementation obligations of the Gwich'in, including administrative regimes for land, resources, and other matters. Effective administration of its rights and resources is critical in achieving the objective of economic self-sufficiency. Yet, the GTC has consistently struggled with a lack of resources to fulfill these obligations. The second example has to do with capacity building. Building the capacity of Gwich'in people is also critical in achieving the objective of economic self-sufficiency. It is an economic imperative that government programs pay more than lip service to the education, skills development, and preferential contracting required ensuring there are Gwich'in people and businesses available to develop the economy.

“Our Negotiators have always raised the issue of lack of funding needed to effectively implement the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. This continues to hamper the Gwich'in people to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to be able to control our own destiny”, Mr. Carmichael said.

The Gwich'in Tribal Council looks forward to working with the new Canadian government on addressing the concerns raised by the auditor general. This government has expressed its commitment to aboriginal peoples and the Gwich'in Tribal Council is hopeful this will lead to a more cooperative approach that paves the road to economic self-sufficiency.

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