



October 15, 2021

Premier Blaine Higgs
Premier of New Brunswick
Chancery Place
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1

Minister Hugh (Ted) Flemming
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Chancery Place
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1

Re: Memo on Land Acknowledgements

Premier and Minister Flemming:

The Chiefs of Mi'gma'we'l Tplu'taqnn Inc. (MTI) were forwarded a copy of a memo dated October 14, 2021, from Minister Flemming to all Government of New Brunswick employees concerning a protocol on acknowledging ancestral territory. The contents of that memo are extremely concerning to us and represents a new low in our relationship with the Province.

For starters, a land acknowledgement is a largely symbolic gesture, but represents a starting point to build and improve a relationship with First Nations. It is hard to see how a government directive to employees to avoid taking even that bare minimum step has us moving forward on a path of reconciliation and partnership.

Further, it is widely acknowledged that the Peace and Friendship Treaties on which our relationship are based are not treaties of surrender or land cession. The signatories of these treaties—our ancestors and yours—intended for all of us to share and be stewards of the land. There was never an agreement between the parties for the Indigenous people of this province to cede the land. It is hard to see how a land acknowledgement that recognizes these historical facts is in any way controversial.

For a number of years, we have raised with GNB staff the need to gain a shared understanding of the Treaties. Throughout our meetings and previous correspondence, we discussed the meaning and intention of the Peace and Friendship Treaties, and repeatedly offered to conduct treaty education with GNB staff, as we have done successfully for many proponents and Government of Canada departments. The Protocol outlined in the memo displays a fundamental ignorance of the treaty relationship, and underscores the need for widespread treaty education, led by First Nations, in the Government of New Brunswick.

Mi'gma'we'l Tplu'taqnn Incorporated

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Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to correct the misinformation in the memo. First, while there may be litigation that claims title to sixty percent of the lands in the province, understand that if our ancestors never ceded or surrendered title, the Mi'gmaq, Wolastoqiyik and Peskotomuhkatiyik claim one hundred percent of the province. While the Mi'gmaq communities we represent have not file a claim in court, we have entered into negotiations with the Province regarding recognition and implementation of our Aboriginal rights and title, and have made clear that we assert title over a significant portion of the Province, and exercise rights throughout our territory. Unfortunately, this memo has us questioning whether the Province is negotiating in good faith, and whether these negotiations are even worth pursuing.


Premier Higgs, we also want to work with government and proponents on economic and social partnerships for the betterment of New Brunswick. We have tried to give you the benefit of the doubt, and we have worked in good faith over the past few years to try and make gains in this relationship. However, you continually take steps that undermine the relationship or achieve any kind of reconciliation. Whether it is by not addressing racism in the justice system, unilaterally canceling the tax agreements, implementing your own Truth and Reconciliation process without input from the Indigenous people of this province, or not recognizing the first National Truth and Reconciliation Day as a holiday, you demonstrate your unwillingness to work on or advance this relationship. Until you can come to the table with an open heart and open mind, we cannot see a way to continue with this relationship.

We reiterate our offer to conduct treaty education for all GNB staff, starting with the Ministers and the Justice Department. Without that starting point, it is hard to see how we can move forward together.

Sincerely,



Chief George Ginnish
Chief of Natoaganeg (Eel Ground)
On behalf of MTI



Chief Rebecca Knockwood
Chief of Amlamgog (Fort Folly)
On behalf of the MTI

Cc: MTI Chiefs