



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

www.bcafn.ca

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

September 20, 2023

BC Assembly of First Nations Strongly Opposes Bill C-53, Urges Rejection of Unconstitutional Act Threatening Section 35 Rights

(Lheidli T'enneh Territory/Prince George, B.C.) – The BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) unequivocally supports the Chiefs of Ontario, together with First Nations leaders, communities, and individuals across the country, in resolute opposition to Bill C-53. This legislation, introduced by Canada without proper consultation, poses a grave threat to First Nations' inherent, constitutional, and human rights, as well as to the integrity of Section 35 rights and title for all Indigenous Peoples.

The Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Implementation Act would grant Section 35 rights to so-called "Métis" groups, setting an alarming precedent for unsubstantiated claims to rights and title in the future. If passed, Bill C-53 would facilitate baseless claims to First Nations' lands, waters, and resources asserted by illegitimate "Métis" groups across the country. Even prior to the introduction of Bill C-53, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), the Métis Nation of British Columbia, and other parties have been asserting that they hold equal claim to First Nation lands under the Constitution, a stance that we find deeply concerning and unwarranted.

At the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Annual General Assembly (AGA) in July 2023, Chiefs in British Columbia joined their counterparts coast-to-coast in unanimous support of Resolution No. 44/2023, Protect First Nations Rights and Interests from Unfounded Métis Rights Assertions. This resolution demonstrates the shared concerns among First Nations leaders and communities regarding baseless "Métis" rights claims within their traditional territories. These false assertions hold extremely harmful repercussions for First Nations' rights and title, undercutting vital laws, legal systems, systems of governance, and jurisdictions.

The BC Assembly of First Nations supports recognizing Indigenous groups with honest, well-founded claims to pre-existing rights and title. However, the MNO's assertions fall significantly short of this standard. Extensive expert reports submitted to Canada provide compelling evidence that six of the alleged "communities" recognized by the MNO have never existed historically. Furthermore, the majority of MNO's claims lack a factual or legitimate basis. Bill C-53 threatens First Nations' inherent, constitutional, and human rights and title.

Canada alleges that the bill will not adversely impact First Nations' rights and title and that the MNO should be able to claim Indigenous rights independently; however, this statement is profoundly flawed and untenable. Granting Section 35 rights to illegitimate groups undermines the integrity of rights and title for all Indigenous Peoples, including legitimate Métis communities.

#honouringourancestors



bcafn

The BC Assembly of First Nations stands in full solidarity with First Nations Leadership, technicians, and individuals, as well as allies and partners, gathered today (Wednesday, September 20, 2023) on Parliament Hill. Together, we firmly oppose Bill C-53 and urge Members of Parliament and Senators to reject this reckless and unconstitutional act.

We call upon Canada to conduct a comprehensive, transparent, and public investigation and engage with First Nations Leadership to understand the facts and issues. Additionally, we call on Prime Minister Trudeau to demonstrate his commitment to reconciliation and good relations with First Nations by meeting with First Nations Leadership to address and remedy this pressing matter to the satisfaction of First Nations in British Columbia.

-30-

For further information, please contact:

Annette Schroeter
BCAFN Communications Officer
(778) 281-1655