

Tahltan Elders Statement
“Dena nenn Sogga neh ‘ine” (Protectors or Keepers of the Land)

We, the Tahltan People, historically a sovereign nation have occupied our traditional territories since time immemorial. Our culture is organized through a matrilineal clan system. This has always been and remains our broad governing structure. Tahltan Elders held the responsibility to uphold Tahltan beliefs, customs, values and laws for future generations.

Our inherent rights are given by Creator and cannot be diminished or removed by any law including discriminatory government legislation such as the *Indian Act*. The clan, elders, families and Tahltan People have been marginalized and fragmented by settler society and the genocidal practices of church and state. Tahltan land remains Unceded territory, which has never been surrendered or taken in war or conquest. We will defend in any way necessary our rights and freedoms, to be self-determining.

Today, we Tahltan People face numerous massive development projects. Agreements have been negotiated in secret between *Indian Act* chiefs, the Tahltan Central Council and government and industry. The promise of jobs does not compensate for loss of land, resources and impacts on the environment and people. This is not only a violation of Tahltan law; it is a fundamental violation of our rights under the Canadian Constitution. No indigenous culture could survive the combined impact of the proposed projects. Our land, and the creatures that depend on that land, would be devastated. Our Tahltan People would be devastated.

Therefore, it is both our right and our responsibility, as Tahltan Elders, to reclaim our legitimate place within Tahltan law and custom. The actions of chiefs and councils, Tahltan Central Council, and others who purport to represent Tahltan interest, have forced us to occupy the Band offices in Telegraph Creek. These non-represented individuals and bodies have exceeded their authority and no longer have the confidence or trust of the Tahltan People and therefore can no longer represent us.

Our responsibilities as Tahltan Elders require us to inform all those who would come to this land and desecrate it for their own financial gain that you can no longer negotiate agreements in secret. Tahltan Elders are the true, legitimate governing body. We will apply Tahltan laws to stabilize, build, and strengthen our nation. We will protect our way of life and Mother Earth from further harmful assaults.

We, the Tahltan Elders are the stewards of our homeland, which we have continued to sustain and hold in trust for future generations make this solemn declaration:

1. We assert our aboriginal title and inherent rights to the land and resources within our traditional territory.
2. We, declare a complete moratorium on resource development in our territory until:
 - a. the leadership dispute has been resolved,
 - b. a fair, just, and legitimate process is developed which honors Tahltan custom and law;
 - c. all Tahltan members are consulted, informed and give final approval of development
3. Prior to any future development in Tahltan Territory, legal agreements must be negotiated with Tahltan Elders that ensure Tahltan People equitable share in revenues generated and are involved in all aspects of decision-making.
4. All agreements negotiated with industry and government to date, because of the absence of the participation and consent of the Tahltan Elders and Families, are hereby declared void.

Ma Duu' Mussi Cho All My Relations