



GITXSAN HUWILP GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE GITXSAN HEREDITARY CHIEFS

Gitksan State of the Nation Address

September 30th, 2024 – National Truth and Reconciliation Day

On behalf of the Gitksan Huwilp Government Hereditary Chiefs, I present our 2024 State of the Gitksan Nation.

On National Truth and Reconciliation Day, the Hereditary Chiefs of the Gitksan Huwilp Government stand before you to reflect on the past year's achievements, present the current challenges, and envision our future as a proud, resilient, and strong traditional Gitksan Nation.

As we gather here on the steps of colonial justice, let us reaffirm our shared commitment to protecting our Anaat, Laxyip and Wilaloo – our very way of life - from corruption of the court and militarized RCMP. Let us reaffirm our commitment to our Gitksan Ayookw the traditional laws that have governed the Gitksan since time immemorial. These laws help ensure our self-sufficiency and sustainability – protecting our elders and raising our youth to be proud of their Wilps - house groups - and their ancestry.

Economic Development and Community Safety

From an economic development and self-sustainability perspective we recognize the importance of economic growth, but it must be balanced with safety and security of our members. Working with our partners at Gitksan Development Corporation we prioritize projects that respect our environment, align with our values and protect our people on their lands. The Gitksan Nation is committed to creating job opportunities for our members and investing in capacity building programs that will empower our community.

Our women are the driving force in our economic security - past, present and future. They control the feast halls and all the spending on Gitksan territory. Today our Gitksan women operate heavy machinery and train truck drivers in every mine and major project. In Hagwilget we have two female doctors. All of our schools are run by women. Our women run all the band offices and programs on reserves and distribute the funds to the Gitksan people.

For our future economic decisions, Hereditary Chiefs continue to support projects that incorporate a deep level of consultation. To be clear, the 10 Chiefs that are directly affected on their Laxyip and Anaat by the PRGT project require additional consultation because the project has materially changed. In order for our Chiefs and their Wilps to realize and share wealth with their house members, complete consultation is essential.

Make no mistake, though the Nisga'a have signed on as a leading First Nation in the PRGT project, they still plan to use industry-led injunctions approved by the BC Supreme Court and carried out by militarized RCMP to oppress our Gitksan people on their traditional lands. This will not stand. Trespass is trespass regardless of who does it. We will not be forced into submission and continue to be terrorized by machine gun wielding RCMP.

1/3

We insist that Chief Justice of the BC Supreme Court, Leonard Marchand Jr. immediately step down from his post. He breaches First Nations justice and our autonomy on our traditional lands - even though he is of First Nation descent and has benefitted from the BC First Nations Justice Strategy. Our very ability to protect our lands and our people must not be left in his hands.

Health and Well-Being

The Hereditary Chiefs know the health and well-being of our community members is a primary focus. We have strengthened our relationship with First Nations Health Authority and activated our people on the Death by Drugs crisis. As we move forward, we must continue to prioritize holistic approaches to wellness, looking to the land and our ancient healing practices alongside modern medicine to meet this devastating challenge. Our community's resilience is reflected in our commitment to supporting one another during challenging times, without judgement but with love and empathy.

Cultural Preservation and our Youth

As a matriarchal society, our women are placed in high regard as the life givers who guide our Gitxsan children from birth until death. Gitxsan women control our blood line and the placing of names on our people. Everyone of our Gitxsan children have a purpose on this earth. Youth are the future of the Gitxsan Nation. By investing in their education, we are equipping them with the tools they need to navigate the world while staying grounded in our Gitxsan values.

This year a new high school is near completion on our Gitwangak Reserve, so students no longer have to leave their homes at 6:30 am to travel to the high school in Hazelton. And, in Hazelton we have a Gitxsan principal at the high school that is devoted to Gitxsan culture being a major component of our youths' journey in education. Many of our youth have entered the legal field as legal secretaries, lawyers and of course our two doctors from the village of Hagwilget. We also proudly have a graduating student in Vancouver who is portrayed in a beautiful film "I Am Gitxsan". This film is about proudly returning home to his culture in Kispiox. We encourage all members to engage with our youth, mentor them, and inspire them to be leaders in their own right. These efforts are crucial in ensuring that our rich Gitxsan language and traditions are passed down through generations. And of course, we will continue to ensure that are youth are kept in community if Family Services get involved in family crisis.

Environmental Stewardship

The Hereditary Chiefs are stewards of the land – our Laxyip and our Anaat – our pristine waterways and fishing holes on the Skeena, Nass, Bulkley, Babine and Kispiox Rivers. We have a sacred responsibility to protect our environment for future generations. We have intensified our efforts in conservation initiatives and advocating for sustainable practices within our traditional territory. To that end, the 2024 Blanket Fishing Ban was announced by the Gitxsan Huwilp Government. With very few exceptions, this ban was honoured by our neighbours and commercial sports fisherman. It is imperative that we work collaboratively with neighboring nations and government bodies to ensure that our natural resources are managed in a way that honors our traditional knowledge and respects the ecosystems we inhabit. We continue to fight elected politicians - financed by the commercial sports fishing industry - and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who continue to ignore that our rivers have depleted fish habitat and spawn beds because they are exposed and destroyed by drought. It is essential for the Gitxsan Watershed Authorities and the Hereditary Chiefs to protect the food security of our Nation.

Relationship Agreements and Negotiations

The Hereditary Chiefs have worked tirelessly advocating for tri-lateral government Relationship Agreements based on our Gitxsan Doctrine - the very core of our identity as Gitxsan people. We have met with half truths, gaslighting, stalling tactics and refusal by the very politicians that are elected for and by the people of Canada to hold an essential Conference with the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs in order to solidify a clear, timely and transparent Relationship Agreement. The Chiefs will continue to exhaust all avenues to move our Human Rights forward.

Conclusion

As we move forward, let us continue to stand together as a united traditional Gitxsan Nation. We have overcome many challenges and achieved much in our quest for self-determination, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. The strength of our community lies in our collective efforts, our resilience, and our unwavering spirit.

Today, I urge each of you to remain engaged, to participate in social justice initiatives that can affect our lives, and to carry forward the legacy of our ancestors. Together, we will build a safer future for the Gitxsan Nation—a future rooted in our values and open to the possibilities of tomorrow.

Thank you.