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THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ANNOUNCES NEW KEY STEP TO RESOLVE SPECIFIC CLAIMS IN CANADA

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OTTAWA, ONTARIO (November 27, 2007) - The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians today introduced the Specific Claims Tribunal Act in the House of Commons, which will create an independent tribunal made up of superior court judges to help resolve the specific claims of First Nations.

The National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Phil Fontaine joined Minister Strahl to celebrate the introduction of this legislation, which was developed jointly with the Assembly of First Nations.

"By setting up an independent tribunal of impartial judges, we are ensuring there is greater fairness to the way specific claims are handled, and speeding up claims resolution," said Minister Strahl. "For 60 years, the Government of Canada has been asked by First Nations and experts to create an independent tribunal to adjudicate claims. Today our Government is taking action to get it done."



While negotiations will continue to be the first choice to resolve claims, the proposed tribunal would have the power to make binding decisions on specific claims that have been rejected for negotiation, when negotiations fail or after three years of unsuccessful negotiations. The independent tribunal would be made up of the equivalent of six full-time sitting superior court judges.

"The AFN is very pleased with the process that was followed in the development of this legislation. It is apparent that when there is political will, we can always find ways to resolve our differences," National Chief Fontaine noted. "Our connection to the land has never been broken and as such the settlement of longstanding claims and the resolution of historical grievances are essential to the health and well-being of our communities."

Today, Minister Strahl and National Chief Fontaine also signed a political agreement that allows them to continue working closely on issues related to specific claims reform that fall outside the scope of the legislation. The agreement sets out shared commitments to address several matters including:

- Improving the processing of Additions-to-Reserves;
- Establishing a joint approach to address historic treaty issues; and
- Dealing with claims over \$150 million, which are outside the Specific Claims Policy.

National Chief Fontaine added that there will be a full briefing on the political agreement and companion legislation to Chiefs from across Canada through regional sessions and the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in December.

The proposed legislation and the signing of this political agreement are key steps forward in the Government of Canada's overall efforts to improve and accelerate its process for resolving specific claims.

The introduction of this legislation delivers on a key commitment made in the *Specific Claims Action Plan*, which was introduced by the Prime Minister in June 2007. In addition to tabling legislation, the Government is moving forward on other measures included in the plan: improving transparency through dedicated settlement funding, speeding up processing, and improving access to mediation.

Both Minister Strahl and the National Chief extended their thanks to the Joint Canada-AFN Task Force that

led the collaborative process to shape the legislation: "We would like to commend all those involved in the development of this legislation for their hard work and perseverance that led to the introduction of this bill and the signing of this political agreement today."

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- Fact Sheet: [The proposed Specific Claims Tribunal Act](#)
- Fact Sheet: [History of Calls for and Efforts to Create an Independent Tribunal](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Specific Claims - A Statistical Snapshot](#)
- Frequently Asked Questions: [Specific Claims: Justice At Last - Canada's Specific Claims Action Plan](#)
- [The proposed Specific Claims Tribunal Act](#)
- [Political Agreement Between the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in Relation to Specific Claims Reform](#)

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