

STATEMENT BY DEHCHO GRAND CHIEF RE ACHO DENE KOE LAND CLAIM

Following consultation with the leadership of the Dehcho First Nations, the Dehcho Process and Elders, Grand Chief Gerald Antoine has issued the following statement regarding the decision on July 14 by the Acho Dene Koe First Nation of Fort Liard to negotiate its own land claim with the Federal and Territorial governments:

We are deeply concerned that this Framework Agreement was signed by three levels of government in such apparent haste and without wider consultation. We are also deeply concerned at the implications of this agreement for the entire Dehcho First Nations and all the communities, which will be affected, especially in regards to the Dehcho Land Use Plan and the expansion of the Nahanni Park Reserve.

The role of Canada and the GNWT in this decision is significant and far from transparent. Indeed, all the events leading up to this divisive decision bear the marks of Canada's long-held policies of 'divide and conquer'. The "talks" which Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl referred to in Fort Liard as having been "under way for a while with Federal Negotiators" did not include the Dehcho First Nations, and were held in secret but included the junior level of government in the Northwest Territories. I was only unofficially informed three days before the signing ceremony.

I am surprised and concerned that this decision, which seriously impacts the cohesiveness of the entire Dehcho region and the peoples' legitimate claim to the land, was taken in such a manner.

I hope the leadership and people of ADK will be very careful and knowledgeable about this first step and the implications of what has been signed for both their traditional lands and the lands of all Dehcho. As a region we can negotiate overlaps with other Dehcho communities. ADK must understand that some 50 percent of their land lies in areas of British Columbia and Yukon and that different claims processes and ratification procedures pertain there.

The Dehcho First Nations has always recognized that each of its 10 communities and Métis locals are First Nation governments and has always been supportive of these community activities. The ADK remains a part of the Dehcho. They are our brothers and sisters.

We regret that they have withdrawn themselves from the Dehcho Process. ADK is welcome to return to the Dehcho Process and we will do whatever we can to be a comfort to them in the hard internal decisions they face. The ADK members must continue to study and discuss the actions of some of their leaders and be certain of the course of action they have taken.

Canada and the GNWT must be called to account for their divisive role in their relations with First Nations which goes back to the days of our Treaties when they have

consistently followed a policy of assimilation and misinterpretation of the intent and content of what our ancestors agreed upon.

We are deeply concerned that Canada and the GNWT, who assert transparency and accountability, have inserted a confidentiality clause on the Framework Agreement that prevents ADK members and Dehcho First Nations and others from any knowledge or participation in the negotiations, which will be kept private until a conclusion is reached. The Dehcho Process has always been public and accountable.

Just a month ago, at the Kakisa Lake Assembly, our chiefs, elders and delegates from all communities approved a wide-ranging and clearly defined mandate for the Dehcho Process to continue, beginning with approval and implementation of the Land Use Plan, followed by self-governance, land selection and jurisdiction processes. It is an important and historic step.

The Dehcho First Nations through the Dehcho Process will proceed immediately to implement this mandate and negotiate our land claims as expeditiously as possible for the best results for all Dehcho.

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For further information please contact Grand Chief Antoine at 867-873-1249