



## THE WESTERN NWT ABORIGINAL SUMMIT

### PRESS RELEASE

#### Aboriginal Summit supports Government Operations Committee report on Bill 15

(July 29, 1999) Yellowknife, NT— Members of the Western Northwest Territories Aboriginal Summit are supporting the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly's Government Operations Committee for changes to Bill 15, the GNWT's proposed legislation to add five new seats to the Assembly for urban areas.

"These measures are the least the Assembly can for Aboriginal people outside Yellowknife," said Gary Bohnet, the President of the Métis Nation--NWT and co-chair of the Summit, after a noon-hour conference call with Summit members.

Bill Erasmus, National Chief of the Dene Nation and co-chair of the Summit, added, "The Committee members who sponsored this report did go out and listen to people. Their report should be taken seriously. We must make it clear, though, that the Dene Nation chiefs, as well as Summit members, do not support adding five seats. Our support for the measures proposed by the Committee does not mean we agree with the intent of the Bill."

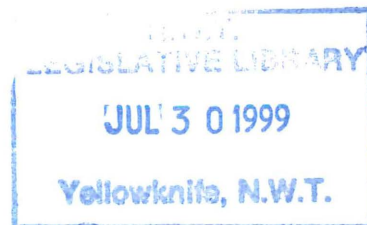
Measures proposed by the Committee include: a workplan with clear guidelines for the negotiation of a political accord with Aboriginal governments; a legal reference to the Supreme Court of Canada on the relationship of Aboriginal rights and individual democratic rights; a six-member Cabinet, with guaranteed regional representation; a constitutional and electoral reform commission; and a "sunset clause" that would repeal the boundaries when the next Assembly dissolves.

Bohnet pointed out that some of the Committee's recommendations cannot be considered in isolation from others. "There is no sense in having a 'sunset clause', if there isn't any provision for a Constitutional and Electoral Reform Commission to work out new relationships and a new plan for electoral boundaries," he said.

The Northwest Territories Cabinet has already rejected some of the proposed measures, including the legal reference, and the introduction of legislation to establish a constitutional and electoral reform commission. The Cabinet has suggested they will negotiate a Political Accord and deal with constitutional development through a proposed Intergovernmental Forum process.

"The mandate and structure of the Intergovernmental Forum process hasn't been defined. The role in this process of regional and tribal Aboriginal governments, the Inuvialuit and the Métis is not clear. It is not even clear the process will get off the ground. Therefore, we strongly support an independent constitutional commission, established in law, and reporting to both the Legislative Assembly and the Aboriginal leadership," Bohnet said.

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