

Government Orders

or third party interests, their rights must be protected in order for us to co-exist without fear.

I have heard some hon. members say that one law should be applied. Whose law should be applied? When our cemeteries are being desecrated, will the government remove the people who are occupying them? How would they feel if our aboriginal people were to go to their cemeteries? Whose law would be applied?

We must bring this to the attention of the Canadian public. Our concept of land tenure is one of sharing the land and resources. If the Canadian people understood that, they would not be threatened by land claims. Their interests would be protected. Aboriginal rights would ensure that. Our forefathers have taught us for many years that our history is very rich.

I have called for a sacred assembly to which all members will be invited. I have invited the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. A letter will also be sent to opposition members inviting them to participate in the sacred assembly which will be held hopefully sometime in December.

The sacred assembly is designed to bring together aboriginal and non-aboriginal leaders, spiritual leaders and religious leaders from all walks of life in Ottawa for the purpose of providing counsel and promoting reconciliation because of the events of this past summer.

• (1240)

What I believe has been missing is the spiritual element of this whole process. The political process has failed us. We need to get back to our traditional spiritual roots. The prime objective is to restore that so that the spiritual leaders, advisers and elders can provide direction not only to our aboriginal leaders but to government leaders across this country as well. This is sorely needed and the time is right for us to address these things.

With those few words, I thank you for listening. I recommend this bill to the members opposite.

Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Prince Albert—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address the House on Bill C-107, the British Columbia Treaty Commission Act. I am extremely pleased to be joining my hon. colleagues in speaking in support of this legislation. It is imperative that we give the treaty commission the legal foundation and powers it needs to get on with the job of settling the dozens of land claims that are casting a cloud of uncertainty over British Columbia.

Settlement agreements acknowledge that claimant groups have some historic interest in the land which was occupied and used by their ancestors long before Europeans moved into the claim area. Equally as important, land claims settlements pave

the way for a better economic future for the beneficiaries. They do so by providing a financial package to the claimant group and by ensuring a secure land base and certainty over resource ownership, all of which are critical to establishing a viable economic base.

The settlement of a land claim is not an end in itself, but a beginning. It is the beginning of a new era in which aboriginal people can regain control over their destiny, a destiny which has been taken from them. They can gain control of their economic future and reduce their dependence on government.

Hon. members have heard aboriginal leaders say time and again that self-government will be meaningless without sustainable economic development that is controlled by the aboriginal people themselves. On the other hand, the expansion of the aboriginal economy can help counteract the human and economic costs that for so many years and for so many generations have paralyzed First Nations communities across this great nation.

Economic development is critical to achieving the red book goal of strengthening aboriginal communities. Self-government, improved social services, better health care, more sensitive justice initiatives: the success of all of these efforts depends in part on strengthened local economies that provide aboriginal people with meaningful employment and reasonable levels of income.

There are many examples of the positive impact land claims settlements have had on aboriginal economies and standards of living. The Inuit of the Nunavik region are a case in point. Under the terms of the James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement, the Inuit established the Makivik Corporation which among other things serves as a holding company for a wide range of businesses that are bringing tangible economic benefits to northern Quebec every day.

I quote from the Makivik Corporation's 1994-95 annual report in which third vice-president Mark Gordon, who is responsible for the economic development program, made the following statement: "There is a common theme that unites all of our initiatives. That theme can be summarized by one word: control". Control by the Inuit people of their own future, control to do good, to enhance the lives of Inuit people.

• (1245)

The Inuit of Nunavik have certainly taken control of their economic future. The Makivik Corporation has used compensation funds to invest in a wide range of successful businesses that are providing employment and income to Inuit beneficiaries.

Air Inuit and First Air, for example, provide critical transportation and delivery services both within Nunavik and between the north and other parts of Canada and Greenland. Both airlines are major employers in the Nunavik region and both reported profitable years in 1994.