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British Columbia Indian Conference

Held at Vancouver,
20th to 23rd June, 1916

STATEMENT

Issued by the Committee appointed by the Conference,
28th June, 1916

(NOTE.—This statement was put into the hands of the Government of Canada and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was published in the press of Vancouver and was sent to each Indian Tribe.)

The Indian Tribes of British Columbia have always claimed tribal ownership of the lands of the Province as the lands of their forefathers, and under Royal proclamation, but since the days of Sir James Douglas the local Government has not admitted their claims.

All the Indians of the Province have for many years desired that this land question should be decided, and to that end in the year 1909 sent a petition to the late King Edward VII., and his Imperial Minister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, asking that the Imperial Government refer the land question to the Judicial Committee of His Majesty's Privy Council.

When, by reason of refusal of British Columbia to agree to a reference, and the McKenna Agreement afterwards entered into by the Governments of Canada and British Columbia, it seemed that the door of the Judicial Committee had been closed against the Indians, the Nishga Tribe was advised that if one tribe presented a direct and independent petition to the King's Great Court, His Majesty's Privy Council, the door of the Judicial Committee might in that way be opened, not only for that tribe, but for all other tribes. The Nishgas therefore decided to take the responsibility of presenting such a petition for the benefit of all the tribes.

With the approval of the Counsel for the Indian Rights Association, and after full consultation with the Government of Canada, the Petition of the Nishga Tribe was lodged in the Privy Council in May, 1913. That action was taken by the Nishgas with the earnest hope that the other tribes would unite in recognizing their Petition as a test case relating to the claims of all the tribes.

After the Nishga Petition had been lodged, the London lawyers of the Nishga Tribe received from the Lord President of the Privy Council a letter stating as reason for not referring it to the Judicial Committee the supposed fact that the Royal Commission appointed under the McKenna Agreement was considering the aboriginal claims, which are the subject of the Petition. Soon afterwards the Nishgas presented to the Royal Commission a memorial in