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Treaty Negotiations Office

**CANADA AND B.C. FUND \$7.7 M FOR SQUAMISH AND LIL'WAT
FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL CENTRE**

WHISTLER – British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell and the Honourable Robert Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development marked National Aboriginal Day by announcing nearly \$8 million for a new cultural centre that will showcase Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations culture and diversity.

“The new centre will help create new jobs and economic opportunities for First Nations,” said Premier Campbell. “It will also be a place where visitors from around the world can experience the strength and vibrancy of Squamish and Lil'wat culture and heritage. The centre is one way we're furthering our New Era goal to materially improve First Nations' quality of life. It's also an example of new opportunities that the 2010 Winter Olympics will create for all British Columbians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike.”

The Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations are receiving \$3 million in provincial economic measures funding and \$4.7 from the Government of Canada through the regional partnership fund for the development of the cultural centre. The First Nations have also signed a 30-year lease with Land and Water BC for the 1.6-hectare property where the centre will be built. In 2001 and 2002, the Government of Canada provided \$392,500 for the planning stages of this project. Private-sector funding and in-kind support are also being sought. The cost of the project is estimated at \$15 million.

“The Government of Canada recognizes the incredible value this project brings not just to Whistler and B.C., but to Canada as a whole,” said Nault. “Not only will it bring jobs and industry to this area; it will showcase the best in contemporary and traditional First Nations' cultures to visitors from around the world. It is also a tangible sign of the partnership with First Nations that is integral to Canada's 2010 bid for the Olympic Winter Games.”

“This project presents exciting opportunities for our two nations: it recognizes the historic and present-day connection the Squamish and Lil'wat have to the land in and around Whistler; it will provide jobs and stimulate economic development for our communities; it will proudly showcase our culture and values to the world. All of this opportunity comes from working together—Squamish, Lil'wat and others,” said Chief Leonard Andrew of the Lil'wat First Nation.

“The Cultural Centre will provide opportunity for our peoples to exhibit and showcase the richness of our heritage and our aspirations for the future while providing an opportunity to create economic synergies that will enhance the livelihood of members of both nations while restoring a link between our two nations,” said Chief Gibby Jacob of Squamish First Nation.

The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre will be located on 1.6 hectares of provincial Crown land opposite the Fairmont Chateau Whistler Hotel. The entire project will be approximately 25,000 square feet for the main building and 6,000 square feet for the eco-tour buildings. The completed facility will include a conference centre, crafts market, high-tech theatre, restaurant, gallery, and guided expeditions.

The provincial \$40-million Economic Measures Fund creates new opportunities for First Nations participation in the economy, including activities related to oil and gas, tourism, shellfish aquaculture, forestry and the 2010 Olympic bid. To date, 113 projects worth a total of \$25 million have been approved. In November 2002, the provincial government, Vancouver 2010 Bid Corp., Lil'wat and Squamish Nations signed an Olympic legacy agreement that includes land for economic development within shared territories, skills and training project and a naming and recognition project.

Since April 2002, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has invested \$7.2 million to support 66 projects in British Columbia. Today's announcement further demonstrates the Government of Canada's commitment to work with First Nations and contribute to strengthening aboriginal entrepreneurial and business expertise while supporting strong, self-sufficient First Nation communities.

This announcement coincides with the eighth anniversary of National Aboriginal Day, a day to pay tribute to the unique heritage, culture and contributions of aboriginal people in Canada.

For photos of this announcement please visit <http://www.gov.bc.ca/prem/popt/gallery/>
This release is also available on the Internet at <http://www.inac.gc.ca> and <http://www.gov.bc.ca>

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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