

# FIRST NATIONS SIGN PACT ON ROLE IN 2010 GAMES

Jonathan Fowlie, Vancouver Sun

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The organizing committee for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics joined Wednesday with leaders of the four first nations that will help to host the Games to sign an unprecedented agreement defining how they will work together.

"We wrote history today; this has never been done before," Vanoc board chairman Jack Poole said after the signing.

"This recognition is something of significance, not just for us as four host nations, but for all indigenous peoples of British Columbia," added Chief Bill Williams of the Squamish Nation, one of the four.

"We now have a vehicle," he added. "We have something to grab on to to be able to be full participants in the Olympics."

Signed during a first nations summit meeting in North Vancouver, the agreement sets out a number of principles for the organization of the Games, including plans to:

- Showcase first nations' language, traditions, history and culture.
- Ensure opportunities for the host nations to be involved in medal ceremonies, arts festivals, marketing and other facets of the Games.
- Improve the health and education of the four host nations through sport, economic and cultural development.
- Work towards increased skills development and training related to the Games, as well as lasting social, cultural and economic opportunities and benefits.

During the signing Wednesday, chiefs from the host nations were extremely supportive of the agreement, and of their continuing relationship with Vanoc.

"Our participation in this is essential and important and I'm very happily honoured to be sitting here with my relatives and colleagues to participate in this," said Chief Leah George Wilson of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

Tom Christensen, provincial minister of aboriginal relations and reconciliation, added he too was very happy with the agreement, and what it signals for the involvement of first nations in the organization of the Olympics.

"Agreements like [this] show us what is possible when we sit around the table and look at the opportunities that lie ahead, what the future of the province holds for first nations, for our youth and for all British Columbians," he said.

In his remarks to the summit, Poole acknowledged the role of first nations people in helping to win the Olympic bid, and underscored the importance of including everyone in the organization of the Games.

"I have no doubt that if it hadn't been for the full support and the participation of first nations in our bid, we would not be here today . . . talking about Vancouver 2010," he said.

"We remember and we honour that support," he added, explaining Wednesday's agreement essentially formalizes the spirit of cooperation that has been present from the beginning.

"It's been a full partnership right from day one."

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