

## **?Akisq'nuk First Nation**

### **Message to the Nation**

**January 2026**

From: Councillor Darcy Fisher

### **The Long Handshake**

In winter ceremony, when we greet each other, we say "ki?su?k kyukyit k'ukin makut" and shake hands just a little bit longer. We extend our warmth. Our well wishes. If we don't see you soon, I'll see you when I see you and I will be happy.

That's the long handshake. Not just between those of us here now. Between ancestors who walked the whole territory and descendants who will inherit what we leave them.

January began at winter ceremony in Cranbrook. A couple nights. Visits. Understanding who we do this work for.

Not for politics. Not for scheming. Not for dividing our people along lines that serve no one.

For the young who need to be heard and cared for in a good way. For the future generations who will defend the decisions we make today. For the presence we leave that outlasts all of us.

### **Building Systems That Unite**

Here's the question winter ceremony brings into focus: how do we build systems that unite instead of divide? How do we make sure no one gets left behind?

Our policies moving forward should serve to empower. To give light to untapped resources. To seek spiritual nourishment. To honor what we've written into our governance.

Not to limit who can reach.

### **The Lines We Draw**

An election year approaches. With it, a proposed amendment to our governance: limiting leadership eligibility to those residing north of the 49th parallel within Ktunaxa Traditional Territory.

I oppose this amendment.

Here's why: what will our children inherit when they look at the lines we drew to limit our own leadership?

The lines we draw become the mess we leave. When we validate colonial boundaries in our own governance, we give others the tools they need for encroachment. We hand them the framework to push us from our homelands. We say: this line matters. And then they use it against us.

How will they tell the creation story when we say Yawu?nik and Nałmuqčin only existed north of the 49th parallel? When we act as if we never travelled south? When we pretend the Jay Treaty shouldn't honor us?

When we accept Section 35 instead of our own understanding of laws, protocols, and connection since time immemorial?

The 49th parallel is a colonial line. It doesn't define who we are. It doesn't limit where our ancestors walked. It doesn't restrict where our relatives live or where our territory exists.

Drawing governance lines along colonial borders tells future generations: the systems that divided us matter more than the natural law that united us.

I won't defend that to the ones yet to come.

### **What December Taught, What January Requires**

December's governance training taught about natural law superseding Section 35. About validating systems that predate contact. About building from our covenant with Creator and our connection to all living things.

January's winter ceremony reinforced it. Spiritual nourishment. Unity. Protection of the young. Systems that empower instead of limit.

These teachings don't align with drawing colonial boundaries around who can serve in leadership.

### **The Work Ahead**

We're Ktunaxa. Our territory spans both sides of a line we didn't draw. Our relatives live where they live. Our leaders come from our people, wherever our people are.

Natural law doesn't recognize the 49th parallel.

Neither should our governance.

When we honor natural law instead of colonial lines, we access the full strength of our people. All our relatives. All our resources. All the wisdom of those who walked before us, wherever they walked. We stop limiting ourselves to what external systems permit and start building from what our covenant with Creator requires.

That's not weakness. That's accessing our actual capacity.

The long handshake continues. Extended warmth. Extended well wishes. Extended to those yet to come.

Build systems that unite. Empower untapped resources. Make sure no one gets left behind.

That's governance that serves the next generation.

If we don't see you soon, I'll see you when I see you and I will be happy.

**Hu sukit̄ qukni,**

Darcy Fisher