

TAHLTAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT PRESERVING ENDANGERED LANGUAGE THROUGH INNOVATIVE AND ACCESSIBLE DICTIONARY PROJECT

DEASE LAKE, BRITISH COLUMBIA, April 25, 2022 – The Tahltan Central Government (TCG) Language Department has begun development of a multi-modal Tāltān dictionary that builds on the foundations of the existing Tahltan Children's Illustrated Dictionary created in the 1990's. The multi-modal dictionary will be an online tool that will include both audio files to help pronunciation and written form for each documented word in each Tahltan dialect.

This Nation-wide initiative is supported by The Language Conservancy, the foremost organization working with endangered languages in North America. The Language Conservancy leverages technology to develop dictionaries for in the space of Indigenous language revitalization initiatives. They are a leader in the use of ground-breaking technology to build language resources – namely multi-modal dictionaries using an innovative method called Rapid Word Collection (RWC). The Tāltān Dictionary Project has been thoughtfully designed to work with all Tahltan Elders and language speakers that want to participate in this historical work and employ other Tahltans who would like to be involved.

The TCG Language Department has begun a staggered approach with documentation of language with fluent speakers happening in each of the Nation's three Communities in Tahltan Territory, Tat'ah - Dease Lake, Tlégōhīn - Telegraph Creek, and Łuwechōn – Iskut. The TCG will work with fluent speakers from outside of the territory during next documentation phases. Once this work has been completed, there will be a web-based dictionary and an App available. The App will be free and once downloaded, users can access the dictionary without internet or cell service.

During a conversation a Tahltan Elder had with her grandson, he asked her, "grandma why do you want to work? We do not need the money?" She replied, "it is for the future generations I am doing this, so that they can learn from it. We need to gather as many words as we can," said Mary Quock, Tahltan Elder.

"Our language identifies who we are as Tahltan people. It is reconciliation in my terms. Because it is bringing people back together," said Pat Etzerza, Tahltan Elder.

"Our team has been hard at work, supported by Elders and knowledge keepers in Tahltan Territory and beyond to create this important tool to both preserve and reclaim our language, knowledge, and culture. This resource will support our people learning their language and being able to pass their knowledge on to future generations. I am so thrilled to see this work progress in such a good way and give thanks to everyone connected to this work – past, present, and future. Mēduh," said Chad Norman Day, President, Tahltan Central Government.

"The process of developing this dictionary has evolved into so much more than just developing a dictionary. The work has brought Tahltans together - Elders, speakers, and learners together in a way that has not been possible for some time especially during the pandemic. The work has provided a space – both a physical and virtual space, for those with a shared vision to work on language together as a collective. It has been an amazing journey to witness. I look forward to our next phases," said Pamela Labonte, Language Director, Tahltan Central Government.

"The Dictionary Project is a legacy piece that will make our language accessible to all membership. It will be a living document that will help keep our language alive. I am proud to have contributed alongside my Elders," said Dhakāle Hayle Gallup, Tat'ah Language Programming Coordinator, Tahltan Central Government.

"This dictionary is not just a dictionary – is a HUGE part of our history," said Verna Vance, Tahltan Scribe.

"My greatest motivation is to keep the language alive and thriving for future generations," said Skye Whiting, Tahltan Scribe.

"Our current dictionary is good, but we must add to it while we have fluent speakers," said Kathy Cottrell, Tahltan Scribe.

It is an honour for me to be a part of the dictionary. It was so awesome to connect and learn from the Elders. We laughed and shared stories. This is something I wanted all my life – to learn more of our language, Tāłtān – Didene keh. To bring it back and keep it alive, **we are still here!** It makes me very proud and happy to speak the language. My heart soars. I hope to inspire others so we can save our language from being endangered. Our language, our stories, our traditions, our teachings of life, our culture, our medicine. To honour our Ancestors and the next generations. I have lots to learn and even more to teach. Mēduh," said Lesli Louie, Tahltan Scribe.

The ongoing work of the TCG Language Department is designed to implement and support initiatives that cultivate an environment to develop Tāłtān proficiencies by making language visible and accessible, engaging with Tahltan people, and creating sacred and safe spaces to learn Tāłtān. The department works to support the development of Tāłtān speakers through Nation-wide reclamation initiatives that reach everyone of Tahltan ancestry, regardless of geographical location. Tāłtān has been identified as a critically endangered language which further speaks to the importance of progressing this work forward in a positive way – for all Tahltans.

ENDS

ABOUT THE TAHLTAN NATION

The Tahltan Central Government (TCG) is the administrative governing body of the Tahltan Nation. The Iskut Band and the Tahltan Band continue to govern Tahltan interests with respect to the Indian Act in the communities of Iskut, Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek. The TCG is the representative government of the Tahltan Nation with respect to the inherent and collective Aboriginal title and rights shared by all Tahltan people.

The Tahltan Nation's Territory spans 95,933 square km of Northwest British Columbia or the equivalent of 11 per cent of the province. Tahltan Territory includes 70 per cent of BC's Golden Triangle – a world-class mining jurisdiction with a thriving mineral exploration sector. For more information, visit: www.tahltan.org.

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