

Provincial and Territorial Ministers
Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs
and
Leaders of the National Aboriginal
Organizations

Ministres provinciaux et territoriaux
responsables des affaires autochtones
et des
dirigeants des organismes autochtones nationaux

Communiqué

CROSS-CANADA COOPERATION ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS PRIORITIES KEY TO ACHIEVING CONCRETE RESULTS

TORONTO, October 29, 2009 – Today, Aboriginal affairs ministers and the leaders of five national Aboriginal organizations agreed to work together, as the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group, to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It is the first time in four years a meeting of representatives from all senior levels of government and national Aboriginal organizations has taken place to address a broad range of issues, over and above the current challenges of the economy, facing First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples.

“This is our generation’s opportunity to ensure that we bring real and substantive change to the quality of life for the next generation of Aboriginal people. This can only be achieved by closing the socio-economic gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Through a revitalized historic process, we will work collaboratively on the most critical challenges facing Aboriginal people – education and economic development. Through this new national process, it is my hope that our work will lead towards a future First Ministers’ Meeting,” said Brad Duguid, Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

The creation of the working group, with membership from all provinces and territories, and the national Aboriginal organizations, fulfills a direction from all premiers in their discussions last summer in Regina, Saskatchewan with the five national Aboriginal organization leaders.

Ministers and leaders confirmed that establishing a strong and enduring working group process of provincial and territorial ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs and national Aboriginal leaders is critical to improving socio-economic conditions for all Aboriginal peoples.

Further, they agreed that many priorities are shared between working group members and the federal government. Where policies and programs exist or are contemplated in shared priority areas, federal government participation will be critical to achieving concrete, measurable results for all Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Minister Strahl thanked the provincial/territorial/Aboriginal working group for inviting him to their meeting. On behalf of the federal government, he looks forward to reviewing the recommendations of the working group and to working closely with the provinces, territories and Aboriginal organizations through the partnerships approach established over the last couple of years, which has already yielded results. The minister also said he would make his officials available to assist the working group officials.

The working group reiterated the premiers' call for a First Ministers' Meeting on Aboriginal issues, and committed to report its recommendations to them just before the next Council of the Federation meeting scheduled for August 2010 in Manitoba.

Ministers and leaders chose two broad priority areas to be dealt with through the working group's new process. These priorities include:

- education and skills training and
- economic development.

Education and Skills Training

Ministers and leaders agreed to work with ministers of education on specific priority areas identified through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, in addition to agreements and processes already in place. There would be an initial focus on K-12 education, with expanded opportunities on other elements along the lifelong learning continuum in the medium to long term.

Topics for further discussions could range from early childhood development through to enhanced post-secondary opportunities for all Aboriginal peoples.

Economic Development

Increasing economic opportunities for Aboriginal peoples is a key priority. The working group will focus on finding ways to explore, enhance and advance economic development in ways that respect the needs and interests of all parties concerned.

Topics could address areas such as impediments to economic and business development, supporting entrepreneurship, or improving trade opportunities and energy sources for Aboriginal communities and peoples.

Health and Well-being

In addition to the two identified priority areas, participants acknowledged that the area of health and well-being is fundamental to achieving progress in those two identified areas. Integral to this area is responding to the issues of violence against Aboriginal women, and missing and murdered Aboriginal women which requires a national, coordinated effort. They agreed that health and well-being would be discussed more broadly at a meeting of the working group in April 2010.

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