

MEETING OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL –TERRITORIAL MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND
LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS LEADERS

TORONTO OCTOBER 29, 2009

Good morning Chairman Duguid, Minister Strahl, Provincial and Territorial Ministers, sister and brother leaders of National Aboriginal Organizations, officials, friends, guests and media.

I express my gratitude to the Mississauga Nation of the Algonquian Family of peoples on whose traditional ancestral homelands we are assembling where the lake opens – Toronto. Welalioq.

I would also, take this moment as National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples to share our condolences to National Chief Shawn Atleo and his family on the passing of his grandmother .

Aboriginal Peoples nation to nation relationships throughout our histories have been conducted by congress. This multi peoples approach to determine fundamental solutions for the well being of all peoples concerned, has been adopted by other peoples desiring to work towards a collective goal.

Each National Aboriginal Leader in this room is an heir, descendant and beneficiary of either pre-confederation treaties, number treaties, Royal Proclamations, or modern day agreements. That is our individual relationship with you. Our elected decision making relationship is one where we devote energy to lobby and negotiate with you, as decision makers, to honour promises and to end the stereotype view about “who is an Indian and where an Indian belongs”.

In 1982, decision makers, agreed that the Federation of the Peoples of Canada includes the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, who bring to the Canadian Federation, treaties, proclamations and promises of liberties and rights affirmed by the honour of the Crown.

This meeting is important to the Premiers of the Council of the Federation (COF). On August 5, 2009, COF charged Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs to form an Aboriginal Affairs Working Group to examine how governments and the National Aboriginal Organizations can effectively focus their work on tangible, concrete results oriented actions. The results of actions to be presented before August 2010, would serve as the foundation for a possible First Ministers Meeting on Aboriginal Issues that year.

This meeting is also very significant for the National Aboriginal Organizations. We never had a process between the Council of the Federation and the National Aboriginal Organization Leaders with a set time frame, a table, and a process with the goal “to develop results based actions” and the invitation “to join with each other as partners to determine tangible solutions” which will make a difference in the lives of all the Aboriginal Peoples.

Too often we rely on the Government of Canada year after year, decade after decade, to develop strategies, policies, actions, programs, initiatives or to convene discussion tables. There are over 353 Federal Government Aboriginal Programs almost exclusively devoted to one sector of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada living on federal lands or within federal agreement areas or settlements. There are very few Federal Programs directed to the off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples and our women in rural or urban areas, and even fewer Provincial programs. I can show you one Federal Program for the off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, which provides more human and fiscal support than the combined provincial programs to the off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples throughout Canada. Don't pull out the calculators - I am sure Canada has the numbers and would quickly share them with all of us.

We have the opportunity to succeed, when we resolve to work together in a transparent, inclusive results focused process. Aboriginal Peoples of Canada have been divided, categorized, listed, isolated, segregated, estranged from civil society, from the social, educational, cultural, economic, technological, innovative, political and more, fabric of Canada for no other reason than the habitual almost automatic inclination to dismiss the relevance of our human dignity, denial of our birth right, dispossession of our lands and resources, disinheritance from our legacy, and denunciation of our continuum of customs, access, uses and practices on our traditional ancestral homelands as descendants of Aboriginal Nations of Peoples.

Over the objections of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the language to limit the process to focus attention to some segments of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada is revealed in document language. Why would anyone introduce the sure way to fail ingredient of a “distinctions based approach”? What purpose does recommendation with an afterthought such as “where appropriate integrate the needs and perspectives of women, urban populations, youth and other issues” have in a forthright process. That type of language, has no place in documents before this table,

We must leave a mark in Toronto as the start of a relationship where all the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and all the levels of all the governments, consciously commit to a process, where every good effort must be expended to produce actions which make tangible differences to the lives of all the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada regardless of where they live, or how they are listed, or how they are categorized or sectored or within which jurisdiction, and so forth.

We must abandon the jurisdictional excuses for inaction, or fear “off loading”, or “more provincial authority”, all of us as members of the Federation carry the load. Let us end discriminatory ways and policies of restricting programs based on boundaries. Let us put an end to the cavalier practice of overt infringement and violation of liberties and rights compacted with the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and affirmed in the Constitution and confirmed by the Supreme Court.

In this process, we must nurture in partnership and produce the best action plans for lifelong educational opportunities which become accessible to all Aboriginal Peoples at all stages of their lives. Childhood development programs and facilities must include cultural components, language and grandmother and grandfather visits, to share the world views, not only for our young, but also between ourselves in celebration of the diversity of the Families of the Federation. Let us look at mechanism where higher education and skills development are not segregated or graded. Both have a purpose and both serve to develop the individual inclinations for meeting the challenges of one world.

Economic development, trade and prosperity are not foreign concepts to us, rather the barriers imposed to protect that which others enjoy is a monumental barrier. Let us examine the barriers at all levels of governments and within all sectors of business and industry. Let us approach economic development with our minds open to the forces and opportunities within a global economy. We must allow Aboriginal entrepreneurial life to once again flow among us and between us. We promised to share as did you the bounty that is on our homelands.

Why can't we look at joint resources developments, sustainability, and or encourage resources revenue sharing arrangements such as advanced by Quebec and British Columbia with Aboriginal Peoples. Why can't we look at oil and gas skills development and entrepreneurial supplier supports as initiated by EnCana and the off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples and by Nova Scotia and Canada.

Quebec, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Canada, Corporate Canada, are not the lesser for taking these progressive partnering actions, and the Aboriginal Peoples involved are contributing to the Federation.

We must not ignore in our work, other fundamental social changes which are happening simultaneously to our work. The impacts of the Matrimonial Property Act, Bill C-21, Canada's Climate Change policy, International trade talks, the recently announced Federal ASETS, Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy,

the policies on Consultation and Accommodation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and that much more occurring daily, does factor in our work in developing action plans. Provinces must begin to forge inclusive partnerships with more than words, the changes will have direct impacts on the approach to decision making within each jurisdiction.

This process must end the legacy of perpetuating conflict, uncertainty, and sharp dealings. Let each of us in congress be forthright in words spoken and written, determined to produce solutions through actions and recommendation which elevate, protect and celebrate the worth, merit, capacity and human dignity of all the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada without regard to where they live.

We must bring a higher standard to a fair inclusive process between Governments and NAO's, the process must directly link all our deliberations at all levels to the highest standard - the Honour of the Crown, a promise made between ourselves which we must always celebrate.

Let us celebrate our continuum, as we resolve to live side by side each respecting the other, always in peace, friendship with our different world views evolving to meet the ever changing challenges of an ever bright and beautiful world.

Let us tackle education, economic development, health, housing, environment, and human dignity together, with respect, sharing and caring for each other as members of the family of the Federation of the Peoples of Canada.

We desire what you desire, and you desire what we desire - "a place there"

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