

Speaking Notes
National Chief Kevin Daniels

Canadian Climate for Aboriginal Employment
Inclusion Works 09

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Good Morning Elders, Chair Lafond, Senators, Leaders, participants and guests.

Thank you for inviting me to join you this morning on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people. It's an honour to be here today to dialogue with you and contribute my thoughts about the current economic crises seen through the lens of Status and non-Status Indians living off reserve and Métis.

This morning we are talking about the world market economy and how Aboriginal peoples fit into this unfolding drama. We know that every shock to the financial system results in casualties,

and our people remain highly vulnerable.

This fact should be of concern to all Canadians, because the companion to economic volatility.... is social unrest. We can see this with the emergence of Aboriginal gangs in the urban centres of Western Canada.

This is an important message that I was able to deliver directly to the Prime Minister and Premiers during an F/P/T meeting in January and again at the Aboriginal Summit on Education held in late February....and it's something for you to think about today.

Economic development is one area where Aboriginal peoples have struggled for many reasons. At a time when we are experiencing major liquidity crises, it may seem overly optimistic to talk about opening new Aboriginal businesses. Even in the best of times, building a profitable enterprise requires careful skilled and focused management, as well as government support.

To improve the economic conditions for our people, the federal government has provided significant amounts of public funding for Aboriginal programs and services. Yet the unvarnished truth is that many of these programs are not working.

Let me tell you why

Since 1901, the Aboriginal ancestry population in Canada has grown from 128,000 to 1.6 million. 80% of the Aboriginal population now live off-reserve. 60% of this population live in urban centres.

Of the almost \$10 billion per year that the Government of Canada invests in Aboriginal specific programming, almost 90% goes to assist on-reserve Status Indians. This clearly outdated policy framework needs to be reshaped and recast. The facts of Aboriginal life have changed and it is time for policies and frameworks to reflect the new reality.

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples has produced two major studies on the subject of economic development and they are both available to you. The first is entitled *Where does the Money Go?* and can be found on our website. Our second study is an analysis of Aboriginal economic development programming across federal departments. This study will be posted shortly on our website.

Dealing with poverty and economic development is a central issue for Aboriginal leaders because welfare and poverty are the hallmarks of our communities. Poverty does not come about by accident - it is manmade. No one chooses poverty.

We know that social unease, crime, and unrest occur when our youth have a sense of exclusion and injustice. It is not surprising that they are driven to antisocial action.

Our people have distinct labour market issues compared to the non-Aboriginal population. We know that short-term training programs are inadequate to deal with the needs of our people.

CAP has been delivering successful HRSDC programming despite the limited amount of funding. The question now is: What will be the successor strategy?

Under the ARHDS program, the funding levels remained static over 10 years, despite the increases in delivery costs and the growth of the Aboriginal population. This created difficulties and among them was providing appropriate salary increases to AHRDA managers, as well as adjusting programs to face the increasing costs.

We also know the importance of keeping a broad focus on the building blocks for Aboriginal participation in the economy. There needs to be:

- A supportive business climate
- supportive governance arrangements
- provision of economic development funding
- support for increased capacity
- access to capital
- access to resources, and
- access to markets including international markets.

When it comes to economic development, it's important that we go forward and build on successes, rather than destroying what is working now. Here is a good example: The snow crab fishery is a successful program for our affiliate the Native Council of Nova Scotia, which holds permanent licenses in the crab fishing areas of Nova Scotia. This has been a profitable and successful employment activity, but the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is now planning to take some quotas away from Aboriginal fishermen and give them to a non-native permanent fleet. The effect of these federal actions will be a loss of millions of dollars to our community.

The Aboriginal crews working in the snow crab fishery take home good money for hard and dangerous work, but the actions by DFO are spreading mistrust and threaten to destroy the economic gains made in this area by Aboriginal people.

Let's talk about the new federal labour market strategy. It will require a strong youth component and special attention to disability issues, literacy and essential skills, and women's issues.

Let me say a few words concerning two of these issues that I would like to see profiled today.

First, it is estimated that 31% of the Aboriginal population live with a disability and many experts believe this percentage is much higher. Yet who speaks for this constituency?

As labour market programming is reshaped and recast, it is our job to ensure that Aboriginal people with disabilities receive appropriate services and assistance to enter the labour force.

Secondly, our people need to improve their literacy skills through a learner-centred approach. This is where literacy programs fit into our culture and not how our culture fits into literacy. We need to deliver effective programs for literacy because it is an essential part of labour market programming. Good reading and writing skills are fundamental to success.

When we are discussing skills development for Aboriginal people, I think our work with ENCANA is an example of the success we are looking for. ENCANA is the developer of the Deep Panuke natural gas field off Nova Scotia.

The Native Council of Nova Scotia and ENCANA Corporation have set up an education and training fund to assist off-reserve Status and non-Status Indians in advancing in the offshore oil and gas industry. ENCANA is contributing \$200,000 annually for skills training in the oil and gas industry, as well as providing assistance to Aboriginal business to provide goods and services.

Many important and difficult questions will be discussed over the next few hours. We will bring our minds together and learn about our duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. As the Mohawk say — Now our minds are one!

Shekon!
Thank you