

**Speaking Notes for
National Chief Kevin Daniels**

**Meeting of Premiers and
National Aboriginal Leaders
Regina, Saskatchewan**

August 5, 2009

Good Afternoon Premiers and fellow national Aboriginal leaders.

It's an honour to be here today in the Saskatchewan legislature and in the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteau, Assiniboine and Métis. I would like to thank Premier Brad Wall and the Province of Saskatchewan for hosting this historic meeting.

I am pleased that we have 4 substantive issues to discuss here today. Nelson Mandela was recently quoted as saying that there are four basic and primary things that people wish for:

- A safe environment;
- To be able to work and provide for themselves;
- Access to good public health; and
- To have sound educational opportunities.

So we are off to a good start

It is appropriate that the issue of jurisdiction lead off our discussions today. The central problem we face is the denial of the federal government that it has jurisdiction over Métis and non-Status Indians under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stated that this denial was at the core of federal government discrimination. CAP says that this denial is wrong in law and we are seeking a declaration to resolve this central issue. It will remove a key obstacle to the negotiation of a range of matters pertaining to the rights and interests of Métis and non-Status Indians.

The federal government has refused or failed to negotiate with us in good faith. As a result of their legal position, Métis and non-Status Indians have suffered deprivations and discrimination in health care, education and other benefits, as well as the opportunity to negotiate or enter treaties with respect to un-extinguished Aboriginal Rights or agreements. As we meet here in Regina, I am conscious that this was the home of the great Métis leader and our National Chief Harry Daniels. He would have loved to have here today, to advance the interests of our constituency. He often referred to the CAP constituency as The Forgotten Peoples. We are the historic national minorities forgotten by government and there is no defensible reason for continuing this discrimination towards off-reserve and Métis peoples. This was Harry's message 20 years ago and unfortunately it remains the case today.

The outcome of this meeting is very important to CAP. From a practical perspective, we are seeking clear commitment from Premiers that you are prepared to engage with us and provide capacity for the process. This important outcome message can guide us all in our collective work in the days ahead.

The pandemic of Swine Flu delivered by the H1N1 Flu Virus is of grave concern to us. This is one of the most urgent health challenges we face, and it highlights the vulnerability of Aboriginal communities. It is not a secret that uncertainties and anxieties are being felt in our communities.

Let us be absolutely clear about this health issue there needs to be a Policy Change in the way the federal and provincial governments are dealing with pandemic viruses. You can no longer side step the involvement of national Aboriginal organizations.

Governments need to coordinate with national Aboriginal organizations to increase readiness against this pandemic strain of influenza and future strains.

Our first and central consideration is the fact that the health status of our people is well below the national average. We need intelligent health policies to overcome these disparities. It is important to emphasize that this will only come about with the expressed political will of the Premiers and the Prime Minister.

We need to be involved, we need the capacity to be involved and we need an integrated and transparent process to find comprehensive solutions. The lessons we will learn in fighting swine flu will assist us in dealing with the pandemic flu viruses that may emerge in the future.

In February, I was pleased to participate in the Summit on Aboriginal Education in Saskatoon. This was a positive signal that provincial and territorial governments are prepared to work on improving outcomes in education for our people. We've been down the education road before and I hope that we can all communicate the sense of urgency that now surrounds this issue. It is a cold reminder to everyone that Aboriginal youth have the highest dropout rates, the lowest levels of literacy, and the lowest levels of skills development.

We know that education and skills development are among the most important components of development and it is education that will improve our lives. Education is integral to poverty reduction strategies.

CAP is prepared to work with your officials to eliminate the gap in educational achievement. We ask you to reach out to the Métis and the off-reserve. We have an education policy ready for discussion and action. A clear signal needs to be given by your leadership to have officials engage with us and begin the process.

The Bank of Canada recently declared an end to the recession. The fact is that the costs of the recession are unequally shared and the unemployment rates amongst our people are significantly higher.

Broadly speaking, the severe credit crisis of the past year has highlighted the importance of the relationship between government and business. What Aboriginal people can positively achieve is heavily influenced by this connection and it is central to the discussions here today.

There is an urgency to get on with this agenda. We were all inspired by President Obama's frequent references to the Audacity of Hope. Why can't that spirit exist here?

I am not naïve as to the scale of this challenge. Many reports and studies have been produced on the subject of Aboriginal participation in the economy, but the political will has not existed to make this a reality. Unfortunately, there is either inadequate Aboriginal input into policies on economic development or there is silence.

The preconditions to economic development include the support and engagement of Premiers to enable Aboriginal economic development. We have a policy on economic development and we are prepared to discuss this with your officials. We need your participation to change, improve and integrate policies and procedures.

In the end Premiers, intergovernmental relations are what this is all about. It lies at the heart of all the policy matters that we have discussed here today. This is Canada at work!

But make no mistake ...we need to bridge the divisions among us and recognize that current policies are not working. I do not pretend that the questions we are dealing with are simple. They are challenging and will require careful study.

At the end of the day Premiers you have choice to make - will you commit to engage with the off-reserve and Métis or will you allow the situation to remain unchanged?

For our part, we are ready and committed to be engaged in a constructive dialogue, based on the understanding that we have some very hard terrain to cover, but we are determined to cross it.

Shekon!
Thank you