

Crown - First Nations Gathering Outcome Statement

January 24, 2012
Ottawa, Ontario

Today, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo participated in an historic Crown – First Nations Gathering. The theme of the gathering was *Strengthening Our Relationship – Unlocking Our Potential*.

Since first contact and the issuance of one of our founding constitutional documents, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the evolving Crown – First Nations relationship has helped shape modern-day Canada. First Nations fought as allies of the Crown in the American Revolution (1775-1783), the War of 1812; and have continued their support of Canada in every major conflict since. Unfortunately, there have been low points in our relationship. A series of misguided and harmful government policies in our past has shaken First Nations confidence in our relationship.

We cannot undo the mistakes of the past, but we can learn from them and affirm that they will not be repeated. In this year, the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and with next year being the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, it serves as an appropriate time to reinvigorate the Crown-First Nation relationships. There have been indicators in recent times that Canada is moving inexorably in the right direction, including repeal of the law that barred registered Indians from voting in federal elections in 1960 by the Diefenbaker government; the recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal and Treaty rights in the Constitution Act, 1982; the historic Indian Residential School apology in 2008; and the endorsement of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2010.

The Government of Canada and First Nations have an enduring historic relationship based on mutual respect, friendship and support. In June 2011, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations launched the Joint Action Plan. One of the outcomes of the Joint Action Plan was the planning of today's historic event. The Government of Canada and First Nations remain committed to the completion of the Joint Action Plan and the principles therein, including:

- *Improving relationships and strong partnerships between Canada and First Nations respectful of Aboriginal and Treaty rights as recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Act, 1982;*
- *Building effective, appropriate, transparent and fully accountable governance structures;*
- *Empowering success of individuals through access to education and opportunity;*
- *Enabling strong, sustainable, and self-sufficient communities;*
- *Creating conditions to accelerate economic development opportunities and maximize benefits for all Canadians;*
- *Respecting the role of First Nations' culture and language in our history and future.*

But we want to take the opportunity of this historic occasion to declare our mutual intention to go beyond the Joint Action Plan and set the context for change. Fundamental change requires that we redouble our collaboration with First Nations to develop the elements upon which our renewed relationship will be based. This will include:

IMMEDIATE STEPS FOR ACTION:

1. RENEWED RELATIONSHIP:

As a tangible first step, Canada and First Nations will work on a renewed relationship that is based on :

1. Movement toward a single, multi-year Government of Canada financial arrangement for First Nations with high-performing governance systems
2. Improved accountability provisions for all parties
3. Financial self-sufficiency of First Nations as the end-goal

A working group with First Nations, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, FinanceCanada and other relevant departments will be established to review the structure of financial arrangements between the federal government and First Nations.

2. REMOVING BARRIERS TO FIRST NATIONS GOVERNANCE:

The Government of Canada and First Nations will work to develop solutions to remove barriers that hinder First Nations governance. The Indian Act cannot be replaced overnight, but through the use of existing tools and the development of new mechanisms, both parties can create the conditions to enable sustainable and successful First Nations.

3. ADVANCING CLAIMS RESOLUTION and TREATY IMPLEMENTATION:

The Government of Canada and First Nations commit to respect and honour our treaty relationship and advance approaches to find common ground on Treaty implementation. The parties also commit to ensuring federal negotiation policies reflect the principles of recognition and affirmation mandated by Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and advance certainty, expeditious resolution, and self-sufficiency.

4. EDUCATION REFORM:

The Joint Action Plan launched a collaborative engagement process to make recommendations on quality K-12 education for First Nation children living on reserve. Upon mutual review of the National Panel's report, First Nations and the Government of Canada will work to implement agreed-upon recommendations as quickly as practicable and establish a process to work constructively through any areas of disagreement.

5. CAPITALIZING ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Within three months, Canada and First Nations will launch an economic task force as set out in the Joint Action Plan that will report back with recommendations to further unlock the economic potential of First Nations. This work will be completed in a timely fashion. Work has already been underway to define the scope of this task force.

As partners in the Crown - First Nations Gathering, we will maintain the relationship through an ongoing dialogue that outlines clear goals and measures of progress and success. To help ensure momentum continues coming out of this event, we commit to work together and release a progress report by no later than January 24, 2013.