

MOVING FORWARD ON A PLAN TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

TORONTO, ON April 28, 2010: Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Leaders from five National Aboriginal Organizations are moving forward on a plan to address the unique challenges and opportunities of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. The plan focuses on three key goals:

- closing the graduation gap;
- closing the income gap; and
- ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

The Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG) comprised of the Ministers and Leaders, met this week in Toronto. Discussions focused on a co-ordinated national approach to close the socio-economic gap which divides First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples and other Canadians. Ministers and Leaders also identified next steps in preparation for the Pre-Council of the Federation meeting of Premiers and National Aboriginal Leaders scheduled for early August 2010 in Manitoba.

AAWG Meeting Highlights:

- Support the call for a First Ministers' Meeting on First Nations, Inuit and Métis issues;
- Affirmation that a strong and collaborative process involving Provincial and Territorial Ministers, and National and regional Aboriginal Leaders is critical to improve socio-economic conditions for Aboriginal peoples, with due regard to gender considerations;
- Continue to urge the federal government to join the AAWG ongoing discussions aimed at achieving concrete and measurable results, particularly given the unique relationship between the federal Crown and Aboriginal peoples;
- Agreement on an action plan to improve education outcomes;
- Agreement on areas which will promote economic development opportunities for all Aboriginal peoples;
- Agreement on collaborative processes needed to work towards ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls; and
- Recognition of the importance of collaboration among Aboriginal peoples, community organizations, the business community and all orders of government.

AAWG Recommendations:

Education is central to success. Improving educational outcomes will lead to a better quality of life for First Nations, Inuit and Métis and greater prosperity and equity for all Canadians. Ministers and Leaders agree that closing the graduation gap between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians is of the highest priority. Priorities should include:

- Engaging the federal government in improving on-reserve and off-reserve educational outcomes;
- Working together with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada on priority areas such as data collection and federal financial investment;
- Working at the regional level with school jurisdictions, Aboriginal school boards and institutes, and First Nation governments, to improve outcomes with particular emphasis on culturally appropriate curriculum, quality teacher training and parental engagement; and
- Improving graduation rates and educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and sharing successes.

Economic Development: Ministers and Leaders agree that federal, provincial and territorial governments, National Aboriginal Organizations, Aboriginal governments, and other Aboriginal organizations, and the private sector must work together to eliminate existing barriers to Aboriginal economic development. There is a need to explore new approaches to:

- Improving access to capital for Aboriginal businesses;
- Encouraging Aboriginal communities to provide leadership for economic growth;
- Building on the Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development; and
- Working together on developing partnerships with the private sector to enhance economic development

Addressing Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls: Ministers and Leaders from across Canada acknowledge that the crisis of missing and murdered First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls must be a priority for action. They agree on the need to increase collaboration and engagement between governments, non-governmental organizations, service agencies, police forces, Aboriginal governments, National and other Aboriginal organizations, with the goal of developing more co-ordinated approaches to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Systemic challenges including racism, sexism, the need for improvements to the overall health, social and economic status of Aboriginal women, must also be addressed.

Federal Engagement: While the parties emphasize the primary and special responsibilities entrusted in the Constitution to Parliament and the Government of Canada in relation to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, all jurisdictions must contribute to improving the quality of life of Aboriginal peoples. Ministers and Leaders believe that progress has been made and full Federal participation is warranted – including the convening of a First Ministers’ Meeting with National Aboriginal Leaders in 2010 to give the focused attention needed to tackle challenges and maximize opportunities.

The Aboriginal Affairs Working Group recognizes that there are unique perspectives of different Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal women, urban and youth populations and that there are existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights in section 35 of our Constitution.

Next Steps: Ministers and Leaders have directed their officials to advance the recommendations agreed to today. More specifically, all parties will work together in preparation for the report back to Premiers and National Aboriginal Leaders at the next Pre-Council of the Federation Meeting in early August 2010 in Manitoba by identifying specific priorities within each of the three common key goals.

Education:

- gathering existing baseline data;
- identifying best practices; and
- where possible, developing inclusive targets, recognizing the diversity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, with due regard for gender considerations.

Economic Development:

- gathering existing data;
- identifying existing programs and initiatives that are available; and
- identifying future initiatives.

Ending Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls:

- identifying all government and non-government partners and information needed;
- identifying best practices and why they work; and
- identifying future initiatives.

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