



National Leaders Call upon Canada for Continued Investment in the Aboriginal Labour Force

OTTAWA, May 28 – At a summit of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement (AHRDA) holders, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine, the President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Mary Simon and the President of the Métis National Council Clément Chartier together announced their overwhelming support for investments in the Canadian Aboriginal labour force through a new federal Strategy.

AHRDA holders from hundreds of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities gathered in solidarity to discuss issues related to the renewal process for the federal Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (AHRDS) that has been in place since 1999 and is due to expire at the end of this fiscal year. Concerns have been raised by the AHRDA holders and National Aboriginal Organizations in relation to the emerging new directions for post 2009 successor strategy. Aboriginal AHRDA holders with full support from their leadership want to ensure that the federal government does not ignore, but benefits from, the years of capacity and expertise built to date under AHRDS.

“What we have discussed today is basically the key message that First Nations will be delivering tomorrow on the National Day of Action. That message is one that all Canadians can relate to. Our young people, our children, represent our hopes and dreams for a better future,” said AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine. “The federal government needs to work right now with the AFN, ITK, MNC, and our AHRDAs to determine what immediate investments are required. These investments will ensure that all Canadians can access the enormous untapped potential of our Peoples, and our communities -- investing in First Nations, investing in all of our Peoples, means investing in Canada’s future.”

Aboriginal people are a major part of the solution to labour demands in the tightening labour market and the rapidly growing shortage for skilled workers. President Chartier reported “especially out west, we see a lot of companies desperate for workers and with a distinct community needs-based approach we are able to invest in the skills of Métis people and help connect the dots to see major employment results. Our talented, capable and rapidly growing young populations are really needed in today’s labour market”.

“The expertise and knowledge Inuit have gained as a result of administering labour market programs and services for over a decade, provides a solid base to build an improved post-2009 federal Aboriginal labour force development strategy. We are the

ultimate experts in understanding our communities' needs and the labour market in our regions and we require the tools and the flexibility to meet those distinct needs" said National Inuit leader, Mary Simon.

According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada statistics, close to 150,000 Aboriginal people became employed as a result of the AHRDS and about half a million client interventions were completed by the approximately 80 Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA) holders across Canada. Despite limited resources, the AHRDA holders have built an effective training and employment infrastructure that has produced real results for Aboriginal people across Canada.

The Assembly of First Nations is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the national voice of Canada's Inuit. The Metis National Council represents Métis people in Canada.

- 30 -

For more information, contact:

Joan McEwen
Director of Communications
Assembly of First Nations
Tel: (613) 241-6789, ext. 242
Cell: 613-324-3329
jmcewen@afn.ca

Stephen Hendrie
Senior Communications Officer
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Cell: (613) 277-3178
Hendrie@itk.ca

Duane Morrisseau
Office of the President
Métis National Council
Tel: (613) 232-3216