



## CROWN-FIRST NATIONS GATHERING

**UPDATE: DECEMBER 23, 2011**

Greetings! First Nations are clearly very engaged in the preparations for the Crown-First Nations Gathering. Our office has received a great deal of interest and the planning is well underway. We greatly appreciate the time and effort so many of you have taken to provide your thoughts and reflections on this important event. I am pleased to provide Chiefs across Canada this update on our activities.

### **Background**

*What is this?*

On December 1, 2011 the Prime Minister officially confirmed the Crown - First Nations Gathering would take place in Ottawa, on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

This Gathering will take place with representatives of the Crown - the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet - and First Nations. The Crown-First Nations Gathering is aimed at re-setting the relationship between First Nations and the federal government. It is the first meeting for Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the collective First Nation leadership. The gathering builds directly on the historic statement of apology, the endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as collaborative efforts like the Specific Claims Tribunal and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Crown-First Nations Gathering creates the potential to take the next step forward in our relationship and advance a forward-looking agenda.

*How did the meeting come about?*

This meeting has come directly from a call by First Nations leadership. At our 2010 Annual General Assembly, Chiefs expressed the need for a meeting with the Crown to discuss our issues. The Prime Minister committed to this gathering in a letter released in December 2010 during our Special Chiefs Assembly. In June 2011, the Canada-First Nations Joint Action brought forward First Nation mandated direction with commitment to address immediate priorities including education, treaty implementation, policy reform in key areas like comprehensive claims as well as specific measures to support First Nation governments and economies. The Action Plan also referenced work to advance and confirm a Crown-First Nations Gathering. The National Chief met with the Prime Minister on December 1, 2011 and announced confirmation of the meeting for January 24, 2012.

*What is the agenda?*

While a formal draft agenda will be shared soon, the following framework is the basis of the agenda development:

**Part One:** Ceremony reflecting and affirming the enduring relationship between First Nations and the Crown as well as confirming the heritage and future of Indigenous peoples' as fundamental to Canadian reality, identity and culture.

**Part Two:** Addresses by First Nation and Crown leadership

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**Part Three:** Concurrent sessions on agreed-upon topics to maximize opportunity for submission for the First Nation delegations to present its views and to dialogue with members of Cabinet, caucus and federal officials as designated. The themes for the sessions would include:

- **Strengthening the Relationship and Enabling Opportunities** (Treaties, rights, governance, jurisdiction, title, etc.)
- **Unlocking the Potential of First Nation Economies** (economic development, partnerships, land issues)
- **Realizing the Promise of First Nations Peoples** (education, health, safe and secure communities, etc.)

**Part Four:** Summary to conclude concurrent session and setting a forward looking agenda

## **Gathering Location**

We do not yet have confirmation of the physical location in Ottawa for the Gathering. Efforts to secure space have been hampered by the fact that a major sporting event (NHL All-Star game) will be taking place in Ottawa the following weekend and most of the conference facilities in Ottawa are already booked. Despite this, there are a couple of appropriate government locations being considered and we anticipate confirmation of the Ottawa location to come soon.

## **Delegations**

The core principle of planning this event has been and continues to be that it is **inclusive**. The venue itself will dictate some limitations on the size of the delegation that can be in the room at any one time. Still, we are working hard to ensure that any Chief who wishes to engage will have a meaningful opportunity to do so. For example, we will maximize the size of the delegation that will be in the room and consider ways in which delegations can trade off during different segments. We will also provide a delegates room that is supplied with satellite feed of the entire proceedings.

We are also finalizing ten (10) unique regional video-conferencing locations for Chiefs participation. More details on the specific locations will be coming soon. We are also confirming a second Ottawa location equipped with space for delegates as well as officials and others who would like to attend. Finally, all Nations are able to provide a written submission which will be featured on the web-site and as part of the record of the event.

All share an interest in maximizing this important opportunity. This naturally requires a level of organization to ensure key issues and interests are effectively addressed.

It will be important that each region coordinate their delegations to ensure that they are represented in a manner which is meaningful to them, and to help determine what priorities they would like address throughout the meeting. The more pre-meeting work we conduct, the more effective the outcome of the day itself will be.

## **Accessibility**

As already indicated, the Gathering will be linked by video conference for Chiefs across Canada to actively participate remotely. In addition, we are ensuring that interested parties across Canada can observe online through a webcast and we are working with various media broadcast companies - many of which are interested in covering the event for television.

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## Website

We have engaged the services of an Information Technology company to help develop a website for Gathering. The site will provide details on the agenda, facilitate online registration, provide background information and be a clearing house for the Gathering, both now and in the future. Once the website is live we will send out the details.

## Registration

A formal registration process will be launched soon. In the interim we are asking Chiefs who are intending to participate in the Gathering to register by January 4, 2012. This is a result of the need to ensure all security protocols are followed for such meetings. We understand this early date is proving to be difficult for some, however, we would appreciate all those who can to register their delegations by email at [cfng@afn.ca](mailto:cfng@afn.ca).

## January 23, 2012

To help ensure that we are fully coordinated a pre-session is being planned for January 23, 2012. This will provide us all with an opportunity to receive the latest information on the Gathering, confirm our delegations, conduct our own ceremonies and be fully prepared for the Gathering itself. Once again, more information will be coming on this shortly. This day will also include an opportunity for regional or other caucus as requested.

## Next Steps

It is clear that we will have much work to do. In the short term, we will confirm the locations and the web-site address within the coming days. As well, during the first week of January, we will confirm the video-conference sites once we have responses from all regional offices.

In addition, we would appreciate receiving the following from Chiefs across Canada on the following:

- Who would attend the Pre-Gathering planning session in Ottawa on January 23, 2012?
- Who would attend the Crown-First Nation Gathering on January 24<sup>th</sup>?
- Who will attend the regional video conference sites?
- Are there written submissions that delegations would like to provide?

Finally, I would like to request that as we prepare ourselves for this event, we also take into consideration the need to prepare with ceremonies at home prior to January 24, 2012. Through ceremony we will be able to seek guidance, strength and direction. This will be as important as any other preparations we make and encourage all of our spiritual leaders to help in our efforts.

We will be vigilant. We will be ready. We will look to take an important and significant step forward in our relationship and our agenda with the Crown.

A new update will come shortly in the New Year. Until then, I want to wish you a safe and happy holiday season!

Kleco! Kleco!

National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo