



Assembly of First Nations

Transforming the Relationship to Work Together on a Shared Vision for First Nations

National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo

Presentation to the
Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development

November 1, 2011

Assemblée des Premières Nations

www.afn.ca



Assembly of First Nations

Understanding the reality

Core trends:

- The socio-economic conditions are well known but the trends warrant repeating:
 - First Nation population is **very young and growing** BUT poorly educated
 - First Nations face a **shortage of paid work** with unemployment rates as high as 80% in many communities.
 - Chronic **health** conditions, not seen anywhere else in the country (Tuberculosis 8 to 10 times that of the rest of the Canadian population; 3 times the rate of diabetes).
- **Deep fiscal and structural challenges** facing First Nations struggling within antiquated *Indian Act* constraints (social, housing, infrastructure and healing needs).
- First Nations increasingly needing to and desiring to create new structures, authorities and ways of doing business independently and in partnership others levels of government and industry.

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Current Relationship

- Characterized by long history of interference and mistrust
- Outdated legislative framework inhibits progress and growth
- Increasing fiscal pressures on First Nation governments – resulting from demographic challenges and discretionary approach to funding – paired with current federal strategic and operational review

however ...

- 2008 Prime Minister's Apology for Indian Residential Schools signaled a new approach
- Canada's 2010 endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets the key parameters requiring mutual respect and partnership
- Further, we can now add approaches such as through the Joint Action Plan as holding much potential to begin a new approach based on collaboration and mutual priorities

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Consensus that we need to do better

- Multiple studies and reports recommend a new course of action – such as the 1981 Penner Report, or the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
- Spring 2011 Status Report of the Auditor General, reflecting on 10 years of recommendations, found conditions have not improved for First Nations in each of the areas examined, and in some cases have gotten worse
- Identified structural impediments which severely limit the delivery of public services to First Nations and hinder improvements in living conditions:
 - Lack of clarity about service levels
 - Lack of a legislative base
 - Lack of an appropriate funding mechanism
 - Lack of organizations to support local service delivery

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Re-set the Relationship

- First Nations have an ambitious agenda for change, in active pursuit of self-determination
- First Nation governments seek true responsibility for the decisions that affect their lives
- A plan of action in four key areas:
 1. First Nation-Crown Relationship
 2. Implementation of First Nation Governments
 3. New Fiscal Relationships
 4. Structural Change

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Re-setting the Relationship

A balanced, practical approach needed to make real progress:

- Advancing the **First Nation Crown relationship** means making demonstrative progress through steps like the proposed First Nation-Crown Gathering
- **New fiscal relationships** to guarantee and deliver sustainable, equitable services based on mutually agreed-to standards.
- **Implementing FN governments** by building our own institutions, planning and accountability mechanisms.
- **Structural change** including machinery of government changes that affirm the relationship, uphold responsibility and increase service standards, responsibility and mutual accountability

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

The way forward

- **Enabling**
 - Moving from constraint and imposed control to **respect, recognition and support**
- **Partnership and Mutual Accountability**
 - Moving from models of dependence and ad hoc and unreliable allocations to **sustainable funding** for basic services
 - Moving from unilateral delegation to **shared accountability** among jurisdictions and accepted **standards**
- **Stability and Safety**
 - Many First Nations are critically vulnerable
 - New financial mechanisms are needed immediately to invest in and stabilize basic First Nation needs for safe water, housing and services for children and families

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

How do we work together?

- Many previous legislative approaches have not reflected First Nation priorities and aspirations
- Results in conflict due to a failure to engage in respectful process as opposed to centered on the content itself
- AFN has long advanced the need for a principled partnership on any legislation to achieve change for First Nations that would include unique elements including:
 - Advance discussion on scope and intent and open information sharing
 - Joint drafting and development
 - Agreed-to processes for decision-making and conflict resolution

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

How do we work together?

- On education we have an opportunity to get this right ... We all agree it is a priority
 - Will require new machinery, new systems and new fiscal arrangements
 - We need to get this right - and we need action through commitment and collaboration
- Related matters
 - Post secondary education – requires increased opportunity, investment and reinforcing the role that communities have in nurturing and supporting their students to succeed
 - reconciliation requires investing in schools, programming and new approaches grounded in FN culture - examples include language programming and youth sports

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

How do we work together?

AANO can support the way forward and help move past structural barriers or points of dissent through strategic study or review on key topics such as:

1. Jointly with Justice and Human Rights and Status of Women, look at **violence against Indigenous women and girls** and work with Indigenous women and leaders on a National Action Plan that will bring clear focus and attention to this issue.
2. Reciprocal **accountability mechanisms**, and the development of standards, capacity and institutional supports, such as a First Nations ombudsperson, independent officer of Parliament and / or Auditor-General function
3. Responding proactively to address **barriers to unlock First Nation economic potential**, such as streamlining policies related to additions-to-reserve and advancing resolution of land rights above the current limit of \$150M

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Concluding thoughts ...

- There is a hard way and a *harder* way to address the problems facing First Nations
- The hard way involves honest dialogue, mutual responsibility and determination to address the difficult issues
- The harder way will entail far greater costs to Canada's competitiveness, loss of opportunity and potential and is something that First Nations do not support
- We need to take principled approaches to practical solutions and work together to achieve the promise and potential of true Treaty partners

Assemblée des Premières Nations



Assembly of First Nations

Concluding thoughts ...

- We appreciate your important role on these issues
- We believe that many of our issues require full collaboration moving beyond a partisan dialogue
- We look to forge all party consensus on key priorities like education to fast track real results on the ground
- We urge you to also streamline approvals of First Nation claims and agreements – we must rapidly increase the rate and pace of change
- First Nation peoples must not wait for the realization of our rights
- We look to you as key partners in this journey

Kleco, Kleco

Assemblée des Premières Nations