

Gathering Strength –

Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

A Progress Report Year One



A year ago on January 7, 1998, we made a commitment to work in partnership with Aboriginal people, the provinces and territories, the private sector and other parties to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and northerners in Canada. We launched *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* to meet this commitment.



Gathering Strength recognizes that a new partnership with Aboriginal people is a prerequisite to much needed reforms and that this partnership can only emerge following a meaningful reconciliation of historic grievances. Over the past year, we have worked on renewing our partnership through such major initiatives as the Statement of Reconciliation and the establishment of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. With these steps, we have begun to establish the climate of trust and mutual responsibility that is needed for jointly making progress on the challenges ahead.



Gathering Strength is an integrated, government-wide plan to address the key challenges facing Aboriginal people – the need for structural reform of the federal government's Aboriginal programming to promote self-sufficiency and economic development and the need to enhance and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal governments and organizations to run accountable, responsive government systems. The action plan consists of a number of initiatives that are grouped under four related themes: Renewing the Partnerships, Strengthening Aboriginal Governance, Developing a New Fiscal Relationship and Supporting Strong Communities, Economies and People.

The initiatives in *Gathering Strength* are mutually supportive and interdependent. For example, prerequisites for supporting and promoting economic development include adequate community infrastructure, a skilled workforce, strong governance structures and a stable business climate. *Gathering Strength* includes initiatives in each of these areas in recognition of the need for an integrated approach.

In this, our first *Gathering Strength* progress report, we highlight some of the key activities that are contributing to important and meaningful change in our relationship with Aboriginal people and northerners. We also note some of the innovative and enterprising partnerships at community, regional and national levels that are helping to increase Aboriginal self-sufficiency. This progress report illustrates how, in full partnership with Aboriginal people, we are building a solid foundation aimed at achieving sustainable, concrete results in future years, particularly in the areas of capacity development, economic development, self-government and structural reform. For those of you who are not yet familiar with our plan, we encourage you to learn more about it and join with us in achieving our goals. Your support is important to the continued success of *Gathering Strength*.

*Jane Stewart,
Minister of Indian Affairs
and Northern Development*

*Ralph Goodale,
Federal Interlocutor
for Métis and Non-Status Indians*

Canada

To Learn More...

- ▲ Read the *Statement of Reconciliation*.
- ▲ Bridge the cultural gap. Learn more about Aboriginal people and their customs.
- ▲ Celebrate our diversity. Learn what we have in common.
- ▲ Visit Aboriginal communities.
- ▲ Support Aboriginal businesses.
- ▲ Learn more about the self-government agreements and land claims negotiations and settlements.
- ▲ Listen to the stories of an Aboriginal Elder.
- ▲ Borrow a National Film Board video production from the Aboriginal directors' collection at your local library.
- ▲ Tell educators in your community about our information sheets for children. Request a sample to share with them by calling (819) 997-0380.
- ▲ Visit our Web site at <http://www.inac.gc.ca> and read about the challenges we are meeting together in the spirit of partnership.
- ▲ Visit the Web sites of Aboriginal organizations.

Innovative and creative partnerships will lead to new opportunities for Aboriginal youth, increased economic development and strong, sustainable Aboriginal communities. Get involved and be part of the solution.

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*Gathering Strength –
Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*

Background Information



What?

Gathering Strength, launched last year in response to the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, is a sustainable, long-term plan that is leading to stronger and more self-sufficient Aboriginal communities. It is based on recognizing past mistakes and injustices; commencing reconciliation, healing and renewal; and building a joint plan to support economic development and strong, sustainable Aboriginal governments.



Why?

Although improvements have been made over the years, conditions in Aboriginal communities still fall below those of their non-Aboriginal neighbours.

Some Aboriginal communities face housing shortages and a lack of amenities like hot and cold running water and flush toilets. The unemployment rate on reserves is about 29 percent, nearly three times the Canadian rate, and the unemployment rate for registered Indians off reserves is about 26 percent. Furthermore, many Aboriginal communities continue to lack the appropriate resources and expertise needed to deal effectively with such serious problems as high rates of infant mortality, youth suicide, and dependence on social assistance which are higher than the national average.

The need to address the discrepancies in living standards between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is compounded by the fact that the Aboriginal population is growing about twice as fast as the overall Canadian population. Moreover, almost two-thirds of Aboriginal people are under 30, and about 35 percent of reserve residents are under the age of 15, which is increasing the demand for school space, housing, public infrastructure, social services and jobs.

Government restraint at all levels has limited the financial resources available, forcing Aboriginal leaders to make some very difficult choices respecting spending priorities in their communities.

The Government of Canada is committed to working with Aboriginal people to build skills and expertise that help them develop their own solutions. As more responsibilities are devolved to Aboriginal people, they gain more governance experience. This, in turn, leads to more sustainable and accountable Aboriginal governments, increased self-sufficiency and economic independence — in short, the means to build capacity and to effect social change.



When?

Gathering Strength, launched on January 7, 1998, set long-term objectives that will bring meaningful change to the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. Through the joint implementation of activities developed in partnership, we are taking steps today to give Aboriginal people—particularly Aboriginal youth and children—the promise of a better tomorrow.



Who?

The success of *Gathering Strength* will depend on the determination and goodwill of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, municipalities and the private sector working with Aboriginal people. The challenges faced by Aboriginal people and communities can only be met if Canadians work together.



How?

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples told us that real change could only emerge after a meaningful reconciliation of historic grievances. On January 7, 1998, the Government of Canada presented a Statement of Reconciliation to Aboriginal people and committed \$350 million for community-based healing managed by Aboriginal people. This opened the door to a stronger partnership and positive change. We are shaping a common vision for the future based on the mutually supportive and interdependent themes of *Gathering Strength*.

Gathering Strength has an integrated agenda. Solid partnerships, stronger Aboriginal governance, increased fiscal self-sufficiency and accountability lead to stronger Aboriginal communities, economies and people. None of these elements works in isolation. So, in the same way, when we improve living conditions, develop employment-related skills and promote economic development, we also develop capacity for good governance and accountability.

Gathering Strength - Canada's A

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Renewing the Partnerships</i>
<i>Objective</i>	We are creating the working partnerships necessary to jointly address needed reforms, through reconciliation and healing, and joint work on program design and implementation.
<i>Some Key Achievements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▲ The Government of Canada's Statement of Reconciliation addressed a series of historic grievances of Aboriginal people, acknowledged the need for a healing process, and set the stage for the new partnership.▲ The Government of Canada provided \$350 million for a healing initiative to address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools.▲ The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, an Aboriginal non-profit corporation established to administer and manage the \$350 million healing fund, is supporting community-based healing initiatives to address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools.▲ An Agenda for Action with First Nations was developed jointly with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) as the framework to implement <i>Gathering Strength</i> at the national, regional and community levels.▲ An Inuit Action Plan is jointly being developed with the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) to ensure unique Inuit priorities are part of the decision-making process.▲ A Métis National Council (MNC) Action Plan has been developed to provide a framework for the MNC and its affiliates to conduct follow-up <i>Gathering Strength</i> consultations.▲ An Accord with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) establishes mutual priorities, such as the need to develop government structures and institutions to address Aboriginal interests off reserves.▲ Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders met in May 1998 to move beyond jurisdictional issues and find better ways to work together to achieve practical results.▲ Joint public education efforts with regional and national Aboriginal organizations are under way to increase public awareness of Aboriginal issues.▲ On urban Aboriginal issues, the Government of Canada published an updated <i>Guide to Federal Initiatives for Urban Aboriginal People</i>; continues to participate in the Aboriginal Single Window Initiative in Winnipeg; and organized two round tables on urban issues involving federal, provincial, municipal, Aboriginal and private sector representation.▲ New regional agendas, similar to the national <i>Agenda for Action with First Nations</i>, have been signed between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's (DIAND) Saskatchewan Region and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), DIAND's Ontario Region and Grand Council Treaty No. 3 and the Union of Ontario Indians, and DIAND's Atlantic Region and the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations Chiefs.▲ A Treaty Commemoration Statement signed by the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, Canada and Nova Scotia acknowledges the longstanding treaty relationship.

Aboriginal Action Plan



Strengthening Aboriginal Governance

We are working with our Aboriginal partners to strengthen their ability to govern themselves in an effective and accountable manner by negotiating new government-to-government relationships, supporting capacity and professional development, and the delivery of programs to Aboriginal people.

- ▲ More than 80 **self-government agreements** are in various stages of negotiation across the country.
- ▲ National and regional programs are in place to strengthen Aboriginal **capacity for self-government** and the administration of programs to develop skills in management and leadership areas such as the roles of elected officials and human resources management.
- ▲ **Memoranda of Understanding** have been reached to guide self-government negotiations between Canada, Métis and off-reserve groups, and provincial governments, in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.
- ▲ More than 1,500 First Nation administrators received training in land, resource, environmental and financial management, statistics, and law making, including 83 First Nation representatives in the **Lands Management Training Program**.
- ▲ DIAND and the AFN are working together to enable the **transfer of the delivery of Lands and Trust Services** to First Nations. To prepare for the change, lands administrators are developing regional networks among First Nation communities.
- ▲ **Self-government Agreements-In-Principle** were reached with Westbank in British Columbia and the United Anishnaabeg Councils in Ontario.
- ▲ A **Final Agreement with the Nisga'a Tribal Council**, the Government of Canada and British Columbia was initialled, settling a century-old land claim and advancing self-government.
- ▲ An AFN-DIAND joint task force has produced recommendations on the creation of an **Independent Claims Body** to improve the effectiveness of the specific claims process.
- ▲ A self-government framework agreement was reached with the **Union of Ontario Indians**.
- ▲ In Saskatchewan, the FSIN, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Government of Canada are undertaking exploratory treaty discussions, with the province of Saskatchewan participating as an observer. This has resulted in a **Statement of Treaty Issues**.
- ▲ A Declaration of Intent was reached with **Treaty 8** in Alberta to begin a treaty and self-government process.
- ▲ The **First Nations Land Management Act** was introduced in Parliament to enable 14 First Nations to establish their own lands and resource management regimes.
- ▲ Five First Nations are participating in the **First Nations Oil and Gas Management Initiative**, a pilot project leading to First Nations' full management and control of oil and gas resources on reserves.

Developing a New Fiscal Relationship

We are working with our partners to develop new fiscal relationships which are more stable, accountable and encourage greater self-reliance in support of Aboriginal governments.

Designing New Fiscal Arrangements

- ▲ **Tripartite Fiscal Relations and Governance Tables**—involving the federal government, the FSIN and Saskatchewan—are designing new models of intergovernmental transfer arrangements.
- ▲ The Government of Canada is working with the AFN to create a **National Fiscal Relations Table** which will advance the development of government-to-government transfer systems.
- ▲ On January 1, 1999, a **new taxation regime** for Aboriginal people living in the Yukon and tax collection agreements for the seven self-governing First Nations were implemented.

Developing Stronger Accountability

- ▲ First Nations are assessing their management practices and developing fiscal by-laws, policies and systems based on the principles of **transparency, disclosure and redress**, consistent with other governments in Canada, and in ways appropriate to their traditions.
- ▲ Alberta Chiefs are developing strong **financial accountability practices** which stress community information-sharing and the rights and obligations of band members.
- ▲ Six First Nations, with DIAND support, are testing ways to **strengthen performance reporting**.

Developing Financial Skills and Capacity in First Nations

- ▲ In partnership, the AFN and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Canada are examining the appropriateness and application of **accounting standards** to First Nations needs, and increasing professional training opportunities.
- ▲ Aboriginal Financial Officer Associations are forming **national and regional networks to increase professional training** and provide advice to support First Nation governments.
- ▲ The FSIN is working with Canada and Saskatchewan to develop an **Aboriginal statistical unit** to support effective intergovernmental fiscal negotiations.

Streamlining the Funding Process

- ▲ The Government of Canada is developing **multi-year funding agreements** with streamlined reporting requirements for Métis and off-reserve groups, to provide more stability, predictability, consistency and accountability in fiscal matters.

Progress Report

Supporting Strong Communities, People and Economies

Supporting strong communities, people and economies is about fostering and promoting adequate community infrastructure, a skilled workforce, strong and fiscally accountable governance structures and a stable business climate.

Investing in People

Linking Social Assistance to Training and Development

- ▲ A national **Policy Coordinating Group** including the AFN, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and DIAND is developing a framework for welfare reforms.
- ▲ 86 First Nations are participating in seven **welfare demonstration projects** to implement reforms that will build capacity and link welfare with training, healing and employment opportunities.
- ▲ **Regional agreements** on developing social welfare reforms have been signed with the Atlantic Policy Congress and the Secretariat of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.

Working with Aboriginal Organizations to Develop New Training Opportunities

- ▲ An **Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council** was created with the federal and provincial governments, representatives of national Aboriginal organizations and the private sector.
- ▲ HRDC's **Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy** will support stronger Aboriginal communities by helping Aboriginal people prepare for, obtain and keep jobs. The five-year strategy which comes into effect on April 1, 1999, integrates all Aboriginal programming, including labour market programs, youth programs, programs for Aboriginal people living in urban areas, programs for persons with disabilities and child care.
- ▲ More than 17,000 First Nations and Inuit youth benefit annually from participation in the **First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy** which provides workforce training and experience.
- ▲ The **First Nations Employment and Training Centre** boosts Aboriginal employment and training in the oil and gas industry.
- ▲ The **Aboriginal Masters Program** recruits candidates with a Masters degree for middle management jobs in the federal public service.
- ▲ The **Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative** helps increase employment by working with employers on strategies to recruit, retrain and promote Aboriginal people.

Improving Education

- ▲ DIAND and the AFN are working to improve education by supporting **38 education reform projects**.
- ▲ The BC Ministry of Education, First Nations and DIAND are working on **special needs** and governance.
- ▲ Alberta's Tribal Chiefs Institute is developing **Cree learning tools** for junior high schools.

- ▲ Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, the Nova Scotia Ministry of Education, Canadian Heritage, HRDC and DIAND are developing **Aboriginal studies and language curricula** for use in band and provincial schools.
- ▲ DIAND is working with a First Nations Education Council representing 21 Quebec First Nations on a major **special needs education pilot project**.
- ▲ An **Education Centre for Excellence** is being established in Manitoba.

Improving Health and Public Safety

Housing and Infrastructure and Safe Communities

- ▲ A new **Housing Innovation Fund** is promoting capacity development and innovation in housing. Eight projects are under way.
- ▲ DIAND funded 54 **water and sewer projects** across the country in 1998-1999.
- ▲ The **Aboriginal Justice Learning Network** continues to offer training and support for Aboriginal people in the management of community-based programs.
- ▲ The Solicitor General continues to implement the **First Nations Policing Policy**. More than 760 fully trained Aboriginal police officers serve some 224,000 people in 316 Aboriginal communities.

Promoting Healthy Living of Mind, Body and Spirit

- ▲ Health Canada, with DIAND, HRDC and First Nations, expanded the **Aboriginal Head Start Program** to give Aboriginal children living on and off reserves a nurturing pre-school environment.
- ▲ Health Canada, AFN, ITC, MNC, CAP and the Native Women's Association of Canada are working to create an **Aboriginal Health Institute**.
- ▲ Canadian Heritage is providing \$20 million to preserve and teach **Aboriginal languages**.
- ▲ Canadian Heritage is supporting the development of a network of **urban multipurpose Aboriginal youth centres** to improve the economic, social and personal prospects of urban Aboriginal youth. A budget of \$100 million will be available until March 31, 2003.

Year One

The Northern Agenda

The *Gathering Strength* objectives are also being applied in the territories to achieve similar goals.

Strengthening Economic Development

Creating a Positive Climate

- ▲ The **Aboriginal Procurement Strategy** led to \$75 million in contracts producing 300 Aboriginal business start-ups and promoting job creation.
- ▲ The **Youth Entrepreneurs Micro-Credit Lending Program** works with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association to improve access to debt and equity capital.
- ▲ The **Opportunity Fund** and the **Resources Acquisition Initiative** will support 70 to 80 new business start-ups or expansions and will leverage \$140 million in business investments.
- ▲ Industry Canada, regional agencies, and DIAND are working in partnership with the Aboriginal private sector and others to **improve innovation, market expansion, access to capital, business information and services.**
- ▲ **Business Partnership Fora** such as the Business at the Summit in BC, the Ontario Economic Renewal Forum, and the Joint Economic Development Initiative in New Brunswick are improving private sector-Aboriginal government cooperation and partnership in Aboriginal economic development.
- ▲ A **Financial Services Roundtable** involving federal officials, the Canadian Bankers Association and financial institutions is identifying ways to improve access to commercial lending on reserve.
- ▲ In April 1998, DIAND's Ontario Region and the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business co-hosted a successful **Economic Renewal Conference.**

Supporting Economic Expansion in Natural Resources

- ▲ The **Fisheries Licence Allocation Transfer Program** increases opportunities for Aboriginal people to work in commercial fisheries. Several licence packages in Atlantic Canada have been retired and re-issued to Aboriginal communities. Up to \$4 million will be spent this fiscal year to assist BC coastal First Nations.
- ▲ DIAND's **Resource Access Negotiations Program** more than doubled to \$4.8 million in 1998-1999, leading to more economic benefits for Aboriginal communities.
- ▲ Métis leaders joined a large Canadian delegation on a **Natural Resources Trade Mission** to Latin America in November 1998, led by the Minister of Natural Resources.

- ▲ Canada hosted the first **International Circumpolar Conference on Sustainable Development.**
- ▲ Working with our northern and Aboriginal partners, we are developing modern and effective **economic development strategies** for the Northwest Territories, the Yukon Territory and the new territory of Nunavut which includes the development of Canada's diamond industry expecting to generate over \$2 billion in revenue over 20 years.

Yukon

- ▲ The **oil and gas transfer** to the Yukon Government will provide local control and resource revenue sharing.
- ▲ We continue to work in partnership to develop a unique **environmental assessment process** for the Yukon.
- ▲ We continue to make progress on land claims and self-government negotiations, including a **final agreement** with the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation, the seventh of fourteen First Nations.
- ▲ Introduction of new **Mining Land Use Regulations** will bring about the implementation of modern mineral and environmental resource management practices.
- ▲ We are working with our Yukon partners to transfer remaining **resource management responsibilities** to the Yukon government and Yukon First Nations.

Northwest Territories

- ▲ DIAND continues to work with the Government of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated towards the creation of Nunavut through such initiatives as implementing the **Nunavut Human Resources Development Strategy** and working through the Nunavut Construction Corporation, a 100 percent-owned Inuit Corporation, to **build government offices and houses** in numerous communities.
- ▲ There has been continued progress on **claims and self-government** processes in the Western Arctic, including the signing of a process and schedule agreement with Deline.
- ▲ DIAND, Aboriginal partners and the territorial government are participating in the **Western Governance Project.**
- ▲ Local Aboriginal government and control has been strengthened through the implementation of **claims settlement resource management legislation.**
- ▲ Partnerships between Aboriginal groups and industry are being fostered as **oil and gas exploration** continues to build capacity, jobs and business opportunities for Mackenzie Valley communities.