

Remarks

Hon. Michael Baker

Minister of Aboriginal Affairs

at

Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly

July 10, 2007

Port Royal Room

World Trade & Convention Centre

Thank you and Good Afternoon

I'm pleased to join you this afternoon for what I know will be a very significant and enlightening presentation on the Made-in-Nova Scotia process.

As Minister of Aboriginal Affairs since our government took office in 1999 I am proud that the process reached an important milestone with the signing of the Framework Agreement last February at Membertou First Nation. Much work has been done since we began our discussions with the signing of the Umbrella Agreement by the 13 chiefs in June 2002.

I think the negotiations on treaty and Aboriginal rights have been marked by a high level of trust and co-operation by the parties involved. Early on, the Mi'kmaq indicated they wanted the discussions to be characterized as Made-in-Nova Scotia to indicate that they would follow their own path rather than one set out in other jurisdictions.

Since this is the first time that all parties have sat down together since the treaties were signed in the 1700s much is riding on their outcome. As a result all sides want to ensure that they are conducted in a manner that is fair and equitable.

There is good will and common interest among Nova Scotians for peaceful and productive resolutions of aboriginal rights, aboriginal title and treaty related issues. In fact, 76 per cent of Nova Scotians said in an Omnibus poll in the fall of 2004 that resolving treaty issues will allow Mi'kmaq and all Nova Scotians to work together to build a better province.

Nova Scotians recognize that treaty negotiations are not about giving up anything, but, instead, are about building a more prosperous future for all citizens of the province.

By dealing with outstanding treaty issues, Nova Scotian Mi'kmaq can make an even larger contribution to the province - socially, culturally and economically.

In Nova Scotia we celebrate our various cultures and value diversity.

Earlier today you discussed the outcome of the Day of Action.

The Mi'kmaq leadership in Nova Scotia decided that since we are in negotiations and have for the last decade worked together as the Tripartite Forum that their message would be a positive one. Information was provided through the Friendship Centre in Halifax and an open house in Membertou to the media about the need for better housing, health care and other services, but the overriding message was that we are working together to provide a better future for all.

An important catalyst for change for the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia has been the work of the Tripartite

Forum.

The work of the Forum has been cited as a model for other jurisdictions in Canada and I hope that during your stay in our province you have a chance to examine its structure and the results it has achieved over the last decade.

Your host, Rick Simon is executive chair of the Forum and I'm sure he would be quite prepared to discuss the Forum in more detail.

So, again, welcome to Nova Scotia and I hope that your stay here will be pleasant and rewarding. You have a very interesting and challenging agenda and I look forward to hearing the outcome of your discussions.

Thank you.