



## ATLANTIC POLICY CONGRESS OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEFS SECRETARIAT

### **Opinion Editorial regarding Crown-First Nation Gathering**

**January 24, 2012**

This week in Ottawa, hundreds of First Nations Chiefs met with Federal leaders. It is the first meeting of its kind since 2006 and it is a huge opportunity for Canadians.

The discussions that will take place will shape aboriginal communities for years to come, and they come at a critical time for our people.

Atlantic Canada's First Nations people are ready to make their full contribution to the economic future of our country. And we must do this by working together.

We believe that the future of the entire Canadian economy and the economy of Atlantic Canada are tied directly to the essential role of our First Nation people.

And we need to take steps to make our communities a strong base for a better future. We need to ensure that our communities have the same opportunities and benefits found in non-native communities. We need a level playing field.

Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing population in Canada. As the private sector and governments of each province search for human resources, our communities must be ready to provide a highly skilled and educated supply of people to join the workforce in every sector.

But to ensure that our youth can take their place as future workers, we need to work together to address some fundamental challenges.

Our youth need access to the right training and post-secondary education. They need support as they enter the workforce. And we need to address difficult challenges like suicide and addiction, to ensure that our children and youth have hope for the future.

We have already made improvements in education. More First Nations youth are staying in school, longer. They are doing better in class. They are going on to higher education, in universities and community colleges. In Atlantic Canada over 1,400 First Nations students are attending Universities and Community Colleges.

We need to continue this good work, and we can do that by working together. We need the partnership of all levels of government, employers, First Nations and all aboriginal employment and support agencies.

We've seen how successful this approach can be.

The Sydney Tar Ponds project provided innovative approaches to create real jobs and business opportunities for First Nations and Unama'ki Benefits offices - a collaborative effort of five First Nations in Cape Breton and now one community in the mainland of Nova Scotia. Over 24 months, this project has produced 71 million dollars in contracts for Aboriginal companies. The project trained 213 people, and has led to 60 permanent jobs.

To take our place in the economic future of our country and our region, First Nations people must move away from the learned mindset of dependence - to independence.

We need to support our children and youth. We need to address claims and self-governance negotiations so we can move forward as a community. We need to ensure stable funding to address infrastructure and housing deficits that at the present rate of funding will take 500 years to improve. We must continue to develop our fisheries. We need to create programs that address the challenges of mental health and addictions in our community.

And we must move away from the current state of crisis, towards real systematic changes in each community. Change that will ensure the survival of our people.

Our focus must be to move entire communities out of poverty toward economic independence. We must wage a full scale attack on poverty so that our people can stop being bystanders to economic developments and opportunities across the country.

And it must happen soon. Not in 500 years, but in 5 years.

The making of First Nations policy must be put back into the hands of the First Nations leadership.

Together, we will build a future with benefits for all of our communities. And we will take our place in the economic future of this country.

-end-

**Submitted by Co-Chairs Chief Lawrence Paul and Chief Candice Paul  
Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat**

***The Atlantic Policy Congress (APC) of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat is a policy research organization that analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact on the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Innu and Passamaquoddy communities and people.***

For further information, contact John Paul, APCFNC, (902) 830-5023