

Notes for a Presentation on Human Rights

By

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To the

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished UN IP Forum on Human Rights Members, Panelists, Delegates:

My name is Dwight Dorey and I have been National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada for the past four years.

The Congress is the national Aboriginal organization that for the past 33 years, has advocated for the rights of Aboriginal peoples living away from reserve lands provided by the Government of Canada .

You may already be aware.....but for emphasis I want to share with you the makeup of Canada's Aboriginal population.

The 2001 census reported that there are 1.3 million people of Aboriginal ancestry living in Canada...constitutionally defined as Indian...Inuit...and Metis peoples.

Of that number...the vast majority....78 per cent... live in Canada's cities, towns and villages...and out on the land...and do not benefit from the provisions of the Indian Act.

I mention this because the Indian Act has been at the root of the problems faced by Canada's Aboriginal peoples since it was created in 1876.

It has divided families...friends and communities...and has created a seriously inequitable and unfair situation with respect to the way we are treated by governments in Canada....both at the national level.....and within our provinces and territories.

It means we, the urban and other off-reserve indigenous people, have become the "Forgotten People"....that no one wants to claim responsibility for....and that has resulted in unacceptable levels of poverty, poor health, cultural alienation, lack of education...and squandered life chances for the vast majority of Aboriginal peoples. It means systemic discrimination!

Recently, Prime Minister Martin assured the Aboriginal leaders who were at the meeting...and me personally...that making the lives of Aboriginal peoples better...and increasing our opportunities to enjoy the quality of life of our fellow Canadians...through improved health..education..housing and economic development....is one of his top five priorities.

That is a bold....positive...and potentially even a courageous statement from the leader of a country with such a large Indigenous population....I'm sure you will agree.

I, for one, do not doubt the Prime Minister's conviction....but, along with all Aboriginal peoples in Canada... I am looking forward to demonstrable proof of his commitment.

So, his capacity to deliver will be the real test. It will unfold as – The Public Service (vs) The Politicians’ will.

We have too many civil servants who want to maintain the status quo ... Those who in effect protect discriminating policies! – who guard assimilation policies! This is our issue, our focus, with the majority of the Aboriginal population.

I believe we must have concrete action plans to address the inequities we face and fulfill the potential of Indigenous societies...in our respective countries...and in this world – Action plans for which member states are accountable ... In that venue, Mr. Chairman, I recommend that the Indigenous Permanent Forum develop an accountability “score card” on member states.

Discriminatory legislation and policies can no longer serve as the basis of our governments’ action plans. The time has come to rid ourselves of discriminatory legislation and policies and of public servants who seek to maintain the status quo.

Welal’in. Thank you.