



UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
New York, May 13 - 24, 2002

**Statement of the Observer Delegation of Canada  
on  
Social and Economic Development**

Monsieur le Président,

Canada est heureux de l'opportunité qui lui est offert de commenter sur le thème du Développement Social et Économique à cette première session, événement historique, de l'Instance Permanente sur les questions autochtones.

Alors que l'Instance Permanente détermine ses priorités et son plan de travail, vous allez devoir faire face à des choix et des compromis difficiles entre toutes les questions touchant les peuples autochtones. Toutes ces questions sont intéressantes et urgentes.

Within the United Nations system, as within individual states, the elaboration of standards and mechanisms for the recognition and protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, including human rights, is of key importance. Canada is committed to these objectives. Rights may come to mean little in the lives of indigenous peoples unless the means to sustainable social and economic development, including strong governance, are also available. An agenda of sustainable development provides a necessary foundation for the meaningful enjoyment of human rights by indigenous peoples.

The challenges are enormous. Indigenous populations are growing. Increasingly, the future well-being of indigenous peoples and the future economic and social growth and stability of many countries are more and more interdependent. Yet, in every region and every country of the world, there remains a large gap between the social and economic

conditions of indigenous peoples and the rest of the population. This is unacceptable. Focussed, coordinated and collaborative action is required globally and nationally to close this gap and raise the quality of life of indigenous peoples.

Le Canada reconnaît le travail important accompli par plusieurs agences des Nations Unies pour s'attaquer aux besoins économiques et sociaux critiques des peuples autochtones. Toutefois, nous croyons que plus peut être fait et doit être fait. Nous vous encourageons donc à placer le développement social et économique des peuples autochtones à un rang élevé dans les différentes priorités à considérer pour les activités futures de l'Instance Permanente. Nous encourageons également l'Instance Permanente à réfléchir sur le rôle important qu'elle peut jouer pour faciliter une meilleure collaboration entre les différentes agences des Nations Unies, les États Membres et les peuples autochtones sur les questions de développement économique et social.

Canada notes that the interaction of rights and development is at the core of efforts underway in the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights expressly charged with evolving the concept and application of the right to development. Canada supports the promotion and protection of the right to development as outlined in the Declaration on the Right to Development, and feels it is important that the issue be advanced in a balanced and coherent manner. Canada has long been committed to processes and initiatives that facilitate and increase participation by indigenous persons in development.

This commitment is reflected in an integration of approaches that characterizes the Canadian indigenous policy framework. This framework encompasses social and economic development, human capital, community infrastructure and governance. Through this integrated approach Canada is making progress in partnership with indigenous people, provincial and territorial governments and the private sector. Canada is committed to sharing its experience with the United Nations system, other states and indigenous peoples, and to an exchange of experiences so that we may

learn from others. The Permanent Forum can provide a valuable mechanism for the dissemination of such information and for the encouragement of co-operative relationships.

In the social sphere, Canada's indigenous quality of life policy framework targets early childhood development, investments in education and the human capacity of indigenous people, and health care improvement.

We are addressing economic development with strategies aimed at empowering indigenous peoples to participate in and benefit from the sustainable development of natural resources, through means such as land claims settlements and the encouragement of partnerships with the private sector. Collaborative efforts are underway between the federal, provincial, territorial governments, Aboriginal peoples and the private sector to expand the participation of Aboriginal people in the labour market, to support the rapid growth of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and their access to capital and to domestic and international trade markets.

Basic infrastructure, housing, electricity and road access are key to the development of the human capacity and economic well-being of indigenous peoples and communities and improvements in these areas remain priorities for Canada . And as Canada moves from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, the entire concept of infrastructure is being re-thought and re-shaped to create opportunities for Aboriginal people. We are making progress on the internet connectivity of Aboriginal people, which is so critical for human capacity building, distance learning and health care and for the future of electronic commerce.

There is ample evidence, both academic and practical in nature, demonstrating that economic development, the creation of human capital and healthy communities with adequate infrastructure, are linked to the existence of good governance. Canada, in consultation with First Nations leaders, communities and individuals is designing a modern statutory framework to provide First Nations with the tools and legal capacity to

operate effective governments, balance the rights of community members and ensure transparent and accountable governance by and for First Nations communities.

Canada welcomes the creation within the United Nations system of this Permanent Forum, with its clear and specific mandate to address a broader agenda of social and economic issues, while issues of human rights are simultaneously addressed by the Permanent Forum and in other existing processes and fora. We encourage the Permanent Forum to organize its priorities and work plans, and the application of its resources, over the first several critical years of its operation, to efforts to coordinate, facilitate and encourage action at the global, regional and state levels to address the basic social and economic development needs of indigenous peoples.

Canada stands ready to assist in this worthy goal.

Thank you.