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## **World Conference on Indigenous Peoples**

Intervention by Mr. Jean-François Tremblay  
Senior Assistant Deputy Minister  
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

Agenda Item 4: Follow-up to thematic studies and advice

Geneva, Tuesday 10 July 2012

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## **Conférence mondiale sur les peuples autochtones**

Intervention du M. Jean-François Tremblay  
Sous-ministre adjoint principal  
Affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada

Le point 4 à l'ordre du jour : Suivi des études thématiques et conseils

Genève, le mardi 10 juillet 2012

Mr. Chairperson,

Mr. Chairperson, during your third session, Canada welcomed the opportunity to submit information to assist in the study on Indigenous peoples' participation in decision-making. A compilation of pertinent issues, comments and examples, from the perspective of the Government of Canada, was submitted at that time to the Expert Mechanism.

As noted in Canada's submission, the right to participate in decision-making does not constitute a stand-alone right under Canadian law. Rather, it complements the federal, provincial and territorial governments' duties to consult Aboriginal peoples. Consultation also occurs for reasons of good governance in the development and implementation of policy and programs.

At last year's session of the Expert Mechanism, Canada welcomed the fact that the final report on *Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Participate in Decision Making* complemented the progress report by focusing on examples of good practices of Indigenous peoples' participation in different levels of decision-making. It was noted that such practical examples can be of assistance to States, Indigenous peoples, and organizations in their efforts to strengthen partnerships.

Government policies actively promote consultation and Aboriginal participation in decision-making. As of February 2011 there were 182 benefit agreements in Canada between mining companies and Aboriginal communities or governments. For example, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, through the Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership is involved in the development of gold properties in the La Ronge gold belt. Furthermore, the Government of Canada recently announced a new investment fund to support Inuit participation in major natural resource projects in Nunavut. The new investment fund will be managed by the Nunavut Resources Corporation and will increase employment opportunities for the growing Inuit population in the territory.

In 2008, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to lay the foundation for cooperation between the two organizations, and to highlight the Canadian mining industry's responsibility to respect and engage First Nations. The Assembly of First Nations has also taken the lead in engaging industry as reflected in their 2009 Memorandum of Understanding with the Mining Association of Canada which focuses on strengthening relationships and increasing opportunities.

The Government of Canada recognizes that the natural resource sector is an important contributor to economic development and job creation. Responsible resource development will protect the environment while fostering growth.

Canada's resource sector is an asset that will increasingly contribute to the prosperity of all Canadians. Some \$500 billion is expected to be invested in over 500 major economic projects across Canada over the next 10 years, driven in part by demand from emerging economies. Increased resource development activities can offer new investment and employment opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and individuals and can generate well-paying jobs for many Canadians. Canada is keenly aware of the contribution that Aboriginal peoples can make to the labour force as the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the nation's population.

Indeed, the Aboriginal population is growing twice as fast as the general Canadian population. By 2026, the Aboriginal population is expected to rise to well over 1.5 million, compared to Canada's overall population which is expected to be between 34 million and 39 million. In 2026, 41% of the Aboriginal population will be less than 25 years of age. By comparison, half of the general Canadian population is under 39 years of age. Every year for the next decade, there will be tens of thousands of potential labour market entrants among this population. This is an opportunity that we, as a country, must seize.

At the Crown-First Nations Gathering held in Ottawa in January 2012, the government reaffirmed its commitment to work together, with willing First Nations partners, to realize our shared priorities. The government recognizes that Canada's growing and vibrant economy will require a skilled and growing labour force in every region: urban, rural and remote. Aboriginal peoples are Canada's youngest population. It is therefore in all of our interests to see Aboriginal people educated, skilled and employed. And there will be no better point in history to ensure that happens Canada's Economic Action Plan 2012 supports the strengthening of the relationship between Canada, Aboriginal Peoples and the private sector through responsible resource development. The government's plan will assist aboriginal people to participate more fully in the economy, not just through an enhanced consultation process – which will help facilitate discussions about how aboriginal people can benefit from economic development opportunities – but also through investments in education, on reserve infrastructure, and a commitment to work with First Nations to encourage those who can work to access job training.

In 2009 the government introduced a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy for the Canadian International Extractive Sector. The Strategy seeks to improve the competitive advantage of Canadian extractive sector companies operating abroad by enhancing their ability to manage social and environmental risks. It recognizes the importance of having projects where investors and operators demonstrate a commitment to responsible investment, leading to economic development.

Mr. Chairperson, there are other federal government initiatives to support Corporate Social Responsibility and the role of Indigenous peoples in extractive industries.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada coordinates federal efforts under the Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development through which issues and opportunities related to resource development are being pursued. These include: developing policy papers; hosting regional roundtables involving senior government, industry, and Aboriginal stakeholders; facilitating unique approaches to mega projects such as Ontario's Ring of Fire; and supporting Aboriginal initiatives under the Major Projects Investments Fund.

In conclusion Mr. Chairperson, these actions are key to unleashing the potential of Aboriginal people for prosperity, self-sufficiency and full participation in Canadian society.

Thank you.