

Madam Chairperson, I appreciate this opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the government of Canada.

I would like to begin by thanking you, Madam Chairperson, and the other members of the Working Group, for your work in drawing the attention of governments in the United Nations to indigenous issues. Canadian representatives have sought to assist the Working Group by sharing Canadian experiences.

During the past year, a new Canadian government has been elected, with Aboriginal issues a significant feature of its platform. The government has stated its commitment to further building with Aboriginal peoples of Canada a partnership that is based on trust, mutual

respect, and participation in the decision-making process. It has also indicated its intention to pursue further initiatives designed to build stronger, healthier and more self-reliant Aboriginal communities.

The government is proceeding on the premise that the inherent right of self-government is an existing Aboriginal and treaty right within section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Self-government arrangements could thus have constitutional protection. Giving effect to the inherent right will require significant changes to existing arrangements.

The government view is that self-government arrangements should: be developed through open processes of negotiation and cooperation; take into account the diverse circumstances of different Aboriginal communities; and operate within the framework of the

Canadian constitution. As a first step, federal representatives are meeting with national and regional Aboriginal leaders, provincial and territorial governments, and other Canadians who have a direct interest in the implementation of the inherent right to listen to their views. When this process is completed, the government will be in a position to consider how best to proceed.

The government is committed to moving expeditiously, in partnership with Aboriginal people, other governments and other Canadians, to find pragmatic ways to make Aboriginal self-government a practical reality.

Other important initiatives have been advanced, Madam Chairperson.

In my statement last year, I spoke about Nunavut. Major agreements had been reached with the Inuit which will

lead to a new, public government for the people of the eastern Arctic. A Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC) was created in December 1993 to provide advice during the transition period before Nunavut is established in 1999. The Commission consists of nine members -- three each from the federal government, the government of the Northwest Territories and the Inuit organization, Nunavut Tungavik Inc. -- plus the chairperson, John Amagoalik. The NIC will provide advice to all three parties on issues ranging from the selection of a capital, and capital infrastructure needs to training.

The Yukon First Nations Self-Government Act has been passed. This legislation gives effect to the Self-Government Agreements (SGAs) negotiated with four Yukon First Nations and provides arrangements for future self-government agreements with the

remaining Yukon First Nations. It provides law-making powers on settlement lands, such as for land use and control and the licensing and regulation of businesses. The Act also enables First Nations to enact laws for their citizens throughout the Yukon, chiefly for the provision of programs and services, such as for culture, health care and the administration of justice.

Canada continues to engage in discussions on the self-government aspirations of Métis and other Aboriginal people without a land base. Implementation of self-government in this context poses special challenges. However, discussions are currently underway in seven provinces on such issues as housing, social services, child and family services, education and employment training, economic development and justice.

Madam Chairperson,

Last year my statement to this Working Group dealt extensively with land claims settlements in Canada and some of the significant results which were achieved. Progress on many land matters has continued.

Comprehensive land claims settlements have been achieved across Canada's Arctic. The legislation recently approved for settlements in the Yukon territory and for Sahtu Dene and Metis add to the settlements already reached in the eastern and central Arctic (Nunavut), the Beaufort area (Inuvialuit) and the Mackenzie valley (Gwich'n).

The Yukon settlement legislation ratifies the framework settlement for the 14 First Nations in Yukon as well as individual First Nation final agreements for four First Nations. The Yukon

framework agreement provides for a total of 41,439 square kilometres of land (an area larger than Switzerland). It also provides more than \$242 million in cash compensation over a period of 15 years, as well as wildlife harvesting rights, subsurface rights, participation on land and resource management bodies, and other matters.

An agreement with the Sahtu Dene and Metis was signed in September 1993 and in June 1994, the Sahtu Land Claim Settlement Act was proclaimed. Under the settlement, the Sahtu Dene and Metis receive: 41,437 square kilometres of land in the Mackenzie Valley; mineral rights for a portion of this land; a capital transfer of \$75 million over 15 years; a share of resource royalties; guaranteed wildlife harvesting rights and participation in decision-making bodies, such as for management of renewable resources.

I am pleased to report that the British Columbia Treaty Commission has started to operate. [The Commission is a tripartite organization composed of members appointed by the First Nations, the provincial and the federal governments. Its mandate is to oversee the treaty negotiations process, and coordinate the start of negotiations and monitor their progress.] Over 40 Statements of Intent to negotiate have been accepted.

Specific claims arise from a breach of a treaty, a statute or some other lawful obligation of the government. In 1993-94, 31 settlements were reached.

Madam Chairperson,

In the remaining time, I would like to briefly mention several matters.

Strengthening Aboriginal communities

in Canada is important. One of these communities is Davis Inlet. Actions are needed which support both the immediate and long-term concerns of the Mushuau Innu community at Davis Inlet. A federal Statement of Political Commitments was accepted by the Band Council on April 27, 1994. This Statement envisages a comprehensive and practical package to support the renewal and relocation of the Mushuau Innu, including: relocation planning; addiction treatment; and self-government and land claim negotiations.

After ratification June 13, 1994 by the members of the Uashat mak Mani-Utenam [pronounced: UASHAT MALLY OTENAM] community in Quebec, a mitigation and compensation agreement for a major hydroelectric project (Sainte-Marguerite-3) was signed on July 14, 1994 by the Chief of the community and

the President and Chief Operating Officer of Hydro-Quebec. This agreement opens the possibility for a new partnership between the Montagnais and Hydro-Quebec concerning training, hiring and contract awarding procedures. It provides for jointly defined impact mitigation measures and includes provisions to facilitate economic, community and cultural development.

Education is vitally important in equipping people to deal with today's society as well as meet the new challenges and perform the new roles self-government will bring. The Indian and Inuit Post-Secondary Student Support Program has been successful in enabling increasing numbers of students to attend post-secondary education. Since 1990, it has assisted just under 22,000 student each year. Additional funding has just been announced, bringing the total funding to \$247.3

million for 1994-1995.

The Aboriginal justice initiative has supported over 60 research and pilot projects in areas such as: dispute resolution; design of tribal court models; alternative sentencing; court worker programs and crime prevention initiatives. Aboriginally controlled policing services are in place in a number of communities and negotiations on policing are proceeding with some forty bands and tribal councils.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has a broad mandate to examine issues concerning the relationship between Aboriginal people and Canadian society as a whole. As mentioned previously, it is composed of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal commissioners and has undertaken extensive research and consultation, including visits to communities across Canada, special

consultations and national round tables on a range of topics. The Royal Commission has completed its public consultation process, after hearing a total of 1,623 Aboriginal intervenors and 444 non-Aboriginal intervenors. The Royal Commission has released several reports and is currently engaged in preparing its final report.

Madam Chairperson,

The past year has seen many changes, both in terms of advances on major initiatives and new approaches on major policy issues of interest to Aboriginal people in Canada. The new government is seeking to enhance the partnership with Aboriginal people and to work with them in strengthening Aboriginal communities. "The priority ... will be to assist Aboriginal communities in their efforts to address the obstacles to their development and to help them

marshal the human and physical resources necessary to build and sustain vibrant communities."

Thank you Madam Chairperson.