

TRANSLATION  
FROM FRENCH

SECRETARIAT TRANSLATION

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CONFERENCE OF FIRST MINISTERS  
ON ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

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YESTERDAY

As I said, our common past is lamentable.

It is curious to note that the immigrants fled from tyranny and oppression and then installed them even more firmly in this country, which we have occupied for thousands of years.

First of all, tyranny of thought. Look at your history books, your films or your television programs: they portray the first nations as savages, good-for-nothing savages. We were not allowed to have our own schools, and in your schools, we were forbidden to speak the languages of our fathers.

Then, you decided that we were not Canadians. The first inhabitants became minors, even deprived of the right to vote until 1960. Yet Indians were good for the slaughter. If you go, for example, to France, you will see that from 1914 to 1918, and again from 1939 to 1945, the cemeteries were filled with native soldiers, the same ones who were unable to choose the politicians who sent them to their death. This was a crime, this was a mistake, wasn't it?

Finally, whether we signed solemn treaties or not, you occupied our land to satisfy your commercial interests.

All this is a sad state of affairs.

I am not alone in this. Look around you, and you will note the absence of many of the first nations. These brothers no longer trust you.

So that we can speak the same language as we look toward the future, I would like to ask you a few general questions:  
First, is an Indian as good as an immigrant - yes or no?  
Second, do you wish to continue your centuries-old policy of suppression of our rights?  
Third, do you truly wish for us to speak to each other as equals?

Even unspoken, your answers to these questions will be of major importance. I will tell you why. Canadians are rightly shocked by the massacres of native peoples in Guatemala and elsewhere. The goal of such hate policies is the rapid extermination of the first inhabitants. But up to now, you have been promising us a slow death. Where does the basic difference lie?

Keep in mind that this is only a small beginning. I remind you of the problem of the glass of wine: you would say that it is half full, but I would say that it is half empty if we adopt these proposals. We still have a long way to go.

#### CONCLUSION

We have reached a turning point: either the right to be different prevails, or progress comes at a snail's pace, and the differences will eventually have to be recognized. We will remain Indian no matter what happens.

The immigrants talk of the Third World. Your governments boast about aid programs for developing countries in Africa or elsewhere. But look around you: the Fourth World exists, and it is represented at this table. A proud Fourth World destined to flourish, in spite of and notwithstanding your often dull, deliberately incomprehensible legal arguments. This development will take place with or without you.

So let us put words into action.