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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING OF MINISTERS  
ON ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

The fundamental question of the status of aboriginal people in Canada or the nature of the constitutional relationships that the aboriginal peoples have with the rest of Canada. The history of the aboriginal peoples and the impact of that history, the deep feeling of distinctiveness that is felt by the aboriginal peoples; the vast cultural differences as well as the unacceptable discrepancies between the social and economic circumstances of aboriginal peoples and society at large must be recognized and accepted as the beginning of constitutional reform.

Statement

by

Hon. Richard Hatfield

Public attitudes, political will, financial considerations and our cultural biases are major factors which will determine the shape and pace of development of and agreement at the First Ministers/Aboriginal Peoples Conference in March.

New Brunswick

Toronto, Ontario  
February 13-14, 1984

Underlying the topics and issues that are being discussed in preparation for the First Ministers/Aboriginal Peoples Conference is the fundamental question of the status of aboriginal people in Canada or the nature of the constitutional relationships that the aboriginal peoples have with the rest of Canada. The history of the aboriginal peoples and the impact of that history, the deep feeling of distinctiveness that is felt by the aboriginal peoples; the real cultural differences as well as the unacceptable discrepancies between the social and economic circumstances of aboriginal peoples and society at large must be recognized and accepted as the beginning of constitutional reform.

Public attitudes, political will, financial considerations and our cultural biases are major factors which will determine the shape and pace of development of and agreement at the First Ministers/Aboriginal Peoples Conference in March.

My statement in Yellowknife indicated that New Brunswick is prepared to continue consideration of the broad issues that have been raised in this constitutional process. Further, in putting forward several points for inclusion in a statement of principles, I was indicating the need for governments to seriously reflect upon the issues that have been discussed over the past year as well as the need for delegates to the First Ministers/Aboriginal Peoples Conference to establish some focus for the continuation of these constitutional talks.

It is going to take considerable time yet to make progress on the issues that have been raised.

We are not going to have agreement on Land base and self government at this year's Conference. Therefore the establishment of a focus for further talks over the next year might be assisted through a political commitment at this year's First Ministers/Aboriginal Peoples Conference to a statement of objectives. Such a statement would commit governments and the aboriginal organizations to seeking resolutions rather than simply restating our respective claims and reservations. This approach is the only viable option for making any progress. I urge the Federal Government to co-ordinate the preparation of a draft statement for consideration at the March conference.

I am very concerned about the Federal Government's restrained view of its role with respect to the aboriginal peoples. It is essential that the federal government play a central role in furthering the development and meeting the needs of aboriginal peoples. The issue of jurisdiction has not prevented the Federal Government in the past from exercising its national responsibility in the introduction of programs for medicare or the promotion of public education in both official languages. The same national interest that compelled federal action in those areas, requires federal action on behalf of all of the aboriginal peoples.