

# **INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY AT THE MACRO LEVEL: ABORIGINAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since time immemorial, we the *Anishnaabe* (Ojibwe) people lived exclusively in the natural world and we governed ourselves as part of that order. Our powers to govern ourselves are inherent in that order and no one can change that order unless by an act of a new creation.

## **A STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT SELF-GOVERNMENT**

To ensure that social and economic institutions of First Nations government are respected, the Canadian government should consider the following framework as a means of establishing a formal relationship with First Nations:

- (1) It should be recognized that a “national will” is required to outline a division of powers. Powers will be negotiated between the Federal Government and First Nations. A bilateral process will be established at the appropriate time, to arrive at or include an agreement. First Nations should participate in the ongoing process of constitutional amendment and revision. Outstanding land claims should be settled, and mechanisms developed to ensure enforcement of land claims settlements. History has proven that Ottawa suffers from severe amnesia in regards to such settlements. Economic development should be furthered so as to reduce poverty. Essential social services of reasonable quality should be available to all Status Indians.
  
- (2) First Nations should be able to generate tax revenues that will improve services to the people and promote

self-reliance. In the long term, such taxation will reduce dependence on federal funding. Individual rights should be protected and respected within the context of respect for the collective rights of First Nations. There should be equal opportunity for all Status Indians.

The United States regards First Nations communities as domestically sovereign. Perhaps First Nations and Canada could consider the American experience and adopt a view similar to that laid out by Kickingbird et al (1997:8):

## **TREATIES**

The treaties were signed for the following reasons:

- (a) to establish exclusive trading relations
- (b) to secure the assistance or neutrality of Indian Nations in warfare between the European powers
- (c) to enable settlement and resource development by non-Indians
- (d) to extinguish the land claims of Native people

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 still stands as the Magna Carta of relations between Native peoples and Euro-Canadians. At the time of the Royal Proclamation, Native people held the balance of power economically, socially, politically and militarily. The European powers were forced to recognize the Indian Nations. The view held by Native people on Nation-to-Nation treaty-making is based on legal and historical fact.

## **NEXT STEP**

First Nations, within the context of self-government, must have adequate power, resources and legitimacy in order to be economically self-sufficient. Power refers to the legally recognized authority to act, including legislative competence and jurisdiction. Other governments must recognize and respect what is done in actual practice. Resources provide the physical and economic means of acting. Legitimacy refers to public confidence in and support for the government.

The current condition of dependency must move toward self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is achieved when a people have control over the resources they need and they have the capacity they require to produce their own wealth in order to meet their needs and to participate meaningfully in regional, national and global economic activities.

Land claims play a vital role in restoring First Nation Governments. Without land, and our spirituality, we have no government or strength as a people.

***The East:*** The sun rises from the east each morning and represents renewal or capacity-building.

The strategy to empower and build capacity among First Nations will be part of a larger circle of care intended to foster community development and to end welfare dependency.

***The South:*** Time and Relationships.

The south represents time and relationships. It will take time to restore jurisdiction with other levels of government. Realignment of Federal/First Nations relations must ensure that the Crown's treaty and fiduciary responsibilities are upheld and that Aboriginal, Treaty and Human Rights and jurisdiction are recognized. Time is a critical element needed to build trust and mutual respect.

Control and Jurisdiction can be enhanced by Placing a moratorium on AFA and FTA transfer agreements because these arrangements limit sovereignty of Aboriginal nations to exercise control in reform. Forming a National Self-Government Commission empowered to administer funds with flexibility and creativity to reform.

***The West:*** Self-Sufficiency.

The west represents a building of inner strength and inner healing. A job is the best healer.

A sustainable economy must be developed that is capable of producing wealth and ensuring equitable distribution to all members through increasing land use and resources. This will

include:

- (a) access to capital for enterprise. It will include large, secondary and small enterprise and manufacturing;
- (b) a focus on circulating money within the community;
- (c) strengthening international indigenous peoples economic networks to facilitate, trade, economic cooperation and collaboration.

**The North:** Sharing.

There are many levels of sharing. The sharing of spirit and the sharing of resources, responsibilities and accountability for First Nation governments must include the following:

- (a) securing an adequate land base for socio-economic development;
- (b) access to development resources;
- (c) access to adequate and appropriate fiscal support;
- (d) adherence to the principles of resourcing inherent to Aboriginal and Treaty Rights;
- (e) First Nations bands have a right to determine their own membership and powers, whether they are alone or formally join other bands sharing the same traditions and language;
- (f) Ottawa finance the New First Nation governments as it does the provincial governments with equalization payments;
- (g) promote partnerships at all levels within the circle of governments;
- (h) respect all aspect of the Native Voice and consider the next seven generations in its decision-making.

## CLANS

Finally, the clan system is being utilized by the United Nishnaabe Council in Northeastern Ontario. The clans are being organized around functions. For example, members of the Loon Clan were traditionally internal chiefs (band administrators), while members of the Crane Clan were external chiefs (Chiefs and Council). Members of the Turtle Clan were the thinkers and poets (policy development and research). Martin Clan members were warriors (security and police), Bear Clan members were the medicine people and Deer Clan members were the peacemakers (justice and conflict resolution). Last but not least, Bird Clan members were the spiritual leaders.

### *Green:*

Green is a healing colour that symbolizes Mother Earth. Green is also a symbol of balance and listening. The earth nurtures the red, yellow, black and white people and all living things. Spiritual leaders emphasize the importance of listening and paying attention to the dark side of life. The dark side of life can be defined by five little rascals: inferiority, envy, resentments, not caring, and jealousy. It means that we stop listening. Listening helps people make the appropriate changes from negative to positive behavior. Listening is an essential component in the foundation on which to reclaim and recreate self-government.

Finally, the spiritual teachings of honesty and kindness permeate all the five colors. These colors are after Green: Red, Yellow, Black and White for the people of the Earth. We believe we can build a world based on mutual respect and trust. Honesty and kindness are the elements of the prevailing belief system which forms the core of a foundation on which to build our concepts of self-government. It is the important first step in which traditional Elders play a vital role in helping us understand self-government at the community level, as well as at the national level.

## CONCLUSION

In the last few years, Elders and Chiefs have started to promote community-based healing, using traditional ceremonies, as a way for communities to start taking over their own responsibilities in the areas that each determines are important. More recently, Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), has adopted a policy to move forward with our Elders; this occurred March 10, 1999, at the University of Sudbury's National Elders Conference. Healing, based on our traditions, builds stronger individuals, families, and communities so that the existing high levels of social problems can be decreased and new forms of social, economic, and political development can occur without federal government control. By its very definition, self-government is community-driven, whereby each community decides for itself the level of self-government it requires. The transition from colonization to nationhood will take time. But only if the spiritual foundation is strengthened and maintained can nationhood be realized in the manner in which it was given, as a gift from the Creator.

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