

Aboriginal Rights



The recent water in crisis in Kashechewan, Ontario highlighted the poverty and living conditions of many Aboriginal Peoples residing on reserves. Kashechewan is not unique among Aboriginal communities for having substandard water. Nearly 100 reserves across Canada have boil-water advisories. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have one of the highest poverty and unemployment rates both on and off the reserve.

The UN Report of the *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people* (December 2004) states that:

Poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, morbidity, suicide, criminal detention, children on welfare, women victims of abuse, child prostitution, are all much higher among Aboriginal people than in any other sector of Canadian society, whereas educational attainment, health standards, housing conditions, family income, access to economic opportunity and to social services are generally lower.

The federal government attempted to “close the gap” between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal people by holding the Aboriginal Summit in Kelowna, B.C. in November 2005. Although treaty rights and self-determination were not on the agenda, the summit did focus on the following issues: health, education, economic development, relationships between government and aboriginals, and housing (including incentives for private home ownership on reserves).

There have been attempts to address these issues in the past but recommendations, like those from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 were either ignored by and large or ineffectively implemented.

An agreement between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments was signed. Highlights of the agreement included the following initiatives over the next five years:

- Investing \$1.8 billion in education initiatives at the early childhood, kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary level in order to close the gap between Aboriginal graduates and non-Aboriginal graduates;
- Investing \$1.31 billion to stabilize the First Nations and Inuit Health System and to build capacity of health care professionals that deal with Aboriginal peoples;
- Investing \$1.6 billion to support housing initiatives on-reserve and off-reserve, including initiatives for water and other infrastructure to regulate water quality on reserves;
- Investing \$200 million to increase Aboriginal employment levels by 30% over the next five years and by 50% within 10 years;

- Investing \$170 million to assist Aboriginal organizations to enhance their capacity to work with governments in policy development and other initiatives, to develop indicators and accountability; and to engage in the renewal of Land Claim and Self-Government policies.

Questions remain, however, about how these initiatives would be implemented as well as the the actual roles of the the provincial and territorial governments and the roles of the Aboriginal communities under this agreement.

Ask the candidates

How will your party close the social and economic gap between Aboriginal Peoples and other people in Canada? What resources (financial and other) would your party be willing to commit to resolve this gap? What is your party's position on the Kelowna agreement?

What concrete initiatives will your party undertake to eliminate poverty and reduce unemployment rates of Aboriginal People?

Is your party committed to resolving the land claims and treaty rights of Aboriginal Peoples? How do you propose to reach agreement?

Is your party committed to the financing of an Aboriginal Women's Summit, in order to address the high rates of violence against Aboriginal Women, among other important issues?



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