

OPENING SPEECHES AT CROWN-FIRST NATIONS GATHERING

Update: 11:25am ET

Governor General David Johnston
Prime Minister Stephen Harper
AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo

Governor General David Johnston:

Thank you for your warm welcome. I am delighted to be here.

This gathering is taking place on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Nation which spans the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

Elder Commanda, I thank you for welcoming us to the Algonquin territory.

I am very pleased to acknowledge the presence of the Chiefs of the Algonquin communities in this region.

From the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan in Ontario, we have Chief Kirby Whiteduck and from the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg in Quebec, we have Chief Gilbert Whiteduck.

It is an honour to have you both here with us, and we thank you.

I also want to express my deepest appreciation for the wampum belt. I am honoured to accept this sacred gift of friendship and diplomacy on behalf of all Canadians.

In the same spirit, I am pleased to offer you as a symbol of our enduring friendship a painting by John David Kelly, which depicts the co-operation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal soldiers at the Battle of Queenston Heights in October 1812.

Let me begin by commending you for the leadership you have shown in coming together for this important gathering. I am inspired, and I am hopeful, seeing us here together.

My hope is that this gathering will serve as the foundation for a renewed and strengthened relationship between the Crown and First Nations. By going back to first principles, we can work with greater confidence—together—to create a brighter future for our families, our communities and our country.

That is my hope, and I know it is one we all share. For inspiration, let us go back and remind ourselves of all that we have in common, and the values that we share.

As governor general, I have been inviting Canadians to imagine ways to build a smarter, more caring Canada. One way we can do this is by understanding and respecting our past as a source of renewal.

We have deep roots together, of shared promise and partnership. This was reflected in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which sought to achieve balance by allowing Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people to co-exist and work together in the land we now call Canada. The Royal Proclamation pre-dated Confederation by more than 100 years and is the foundation of our modern relationship.

The basic premise was mutual respect.

But let us go back even further, to the days of Samuel de Champlain and the scene of the First Nations assembly of 1603, known as the Great Tabagie.

As historian David Fischer has written, this assembly, in which European and First Nation leaders seized the opportunity to establish good relations for mutual benefit, marked the beginning of an important alliance:

“[The European and First Nations leaders] treated each other with dignity, forbearance and respect. They began to build an atmosphere of trust that was fundamental to relations between Europeans and [First Nations] ... When trust grew strong, many things were possible.”

That remains true today. When trust is strong, many things are possible.

In the wake of the 1763 Royal Proclamation, Sir William Johnson, the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs who strongly believed in equitable coexistence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, held a grand council at Niagara with some 2,500 First Nations peoples.

At this meeting, Sir William extended the “Covenant Chain”, which represents the core of the Crown's relationship with its First Nations allies, to all First Nations. In doing so, Sir William was calling upon both First Nations peoples and European settlers to live together in a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship.

This gathering today is the modern version of that important council. And we have an opportunity to continue restoring the trust we have lost through the mistakes of the past.

Without a doubt, many First Nations individuals and communities are achieving great success in Canada and the world today. But there is still much to be done on the road to reconciliation and recovery. Together, we must focus on building trust and to do so in ways, such as in the education sector, that are concrete and practical.

Our future hinges on our ability to share and to learn from each other, and to create the conditions in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can thrive equally, according to their hopes and dreams.

In a country as vast and diverse as Canada, the learning never ends. And nor should it. Our greatest potential lies in what we have yet to learn.

As we open this gathering, let us reflect on the promise of this land that we share; let us strengthen and burnish the Covenant Chain that binds us, and pledge to renew our dreams together.

I would now like to declare this Crown-First Nations gathering open.

Thank you.

(prepared remarks)

Prime Minister Stephen Harper

Au-gee-na-pee

Bienvenue, Mesdames et messieurs, Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a pleasure To welcome you ... on the traditional territory of the Algonquin ... to this historic Crown-First Nations Gathering. And it is especially appropriate to do so in this building ... un édifice dont le nom honore la mémoire du Premier ministre John George Diefenbaker, l'instigateur des relations de l'ère moderne entre la Couronne et les Premières Nations ... a building whose name honours the memory of a prime minister who cared deeply about the things we are gathered here to talk about: respect, rights and opportunity for First Nations Canadians.

John George Diefenbaker was, in many ways, the initiator of the modern era of Crown – First Nations relations.

It was he who named the first First Nations member to the Parliament of Canada, Senator James Gladstone in 1958.

And, of course, it was he who, two years later, extended to aboriginal Canadians living on reserves the right to vote in national elections.

In addressing that long-standing and fundamental injustice, he was a man ahead of his time and in many ways, an apt inspiration for today's proceedings.

Bonjour à vous tous, qui êtes sur place et qui participez d'un bout à l'autre du Canada :

Greetings to all, participating across Canada and here:

His Excellency, Governor General Johnston (and Mrs. Johnston), Minister Duncan, Secretary Rickford, Senators and Members of Parliament ...

Distingués invités ... Elders, chiefs ... Including Chief Weasel Head and Peter Standing Alone from my home nation, the Blood First Nation of Southern Alberta.

And, of course, National Chief Atleo. It is in no small part the vision and conception of the National Chief that has led to this gathering today, and I know we all congratulate him for that leadership!

Ladies and gentlemen, Friends ... Hier marquait le sixième anniversaire de l'élection générale dans laquelle les Canadiens ont confié, pour la première fois, la direction de notre pays à notre gouvernement.

These past six years have been a time of, putting it mildly, distractions ... of elections, minority Parliaments, and, of course, world economic and financial crises.

Malgré cela, notre gouvernement a travaillé fort pour régler des questions qui préoccupent depuis longtemps les membres des Premières Nations du Canada.

Et je crois que, compte tenu du travail que nous avons accompli ensemble jusqu'à maintenant ... nous avons une chance en or de renforcer nos relations et d'offrir des opportunités économiques aux Canadiens et aux Canadiennes d'origine autochtone.

Nevertheless, Our Government has worked hard to deal with matters of abiding concern to members of Canada's First Nations.

And I believe that, as a consequence of our work together thus far, we have exciting opportunities to strengthen our relationships.

More than that, such will be the demand for labour in our future economy that we are positioned today to unlock the enormous economic potential of First Nations people ... and to do so in a way that meets our mutual goals.

Canada's growing and vibrant economy will require a skilled and growing labour force in every region: urban, rural and remote. Aboriginal peoples are Canada's youngest population. It is therefore in all of our interests to see aboriginal people educated, skilled and employed.

And there will be no better point in history to ensure that happens. In a moment, I will come back to that.

First however, I must say this. Toute relation a ses hauts et ses bas. Toute relation est marquée par des consensus et des désaccords. Mais je crois que dans toute relation, il est important de mettre l'accent sur les moments forts... Et la relation entre les Premières Nations et le Canada en compte plusieurs.

Every relationship has its ups and downs, moments of consensus and of disagreement. I believe it is important to build a narrative of any relationship based on its highest points.

In the relationship of First Nations with Canada, there are some very high points.

We have the Royal Proclamation of 1763, of which we will mark the 250th anniversary next year, a foundation of the Crown-First Nation relationship.

We have, of course, all the historic treaties, large and small.

We have the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, this year, in which aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples joined under the Crown ... ultimately laying the basis for a distinct country in the northern half of this continent.

And, of course, all the wars since, in which aboriginal people have always fought alongside their fellow Canadians in the defence of freedom and democracy here and around the world.

There are great things on which to build.

Cela dit, nous devons aussi reconnaître qu'il y a eu des moments moins réjouissants...des moments très difficiles...En réalité, pour des générations, la relation entre nos peuples a été assombrie.

Elle a été assombrie, en particulier, par le fait que des enfants autochtones ont été forcés de fréquenter des pensionnats...

Nonetheless, we must acknowledge the not-so-uplifting moments, some very low points ... and the reality that, for generations, the relationship between our peoples was tainted ... tainted in a manner that eroded trust and blocked ways forward as does a tree fallen across a road.

Tainted in particular by the experience of the forced residential schools ... the explicit attempt to destroy aboriginal culture and to dismantle the aboriginal family ... that wounded so many so deeply. That is why one of my most rewarding days in office was when I rose in the House to deliver an apology to those students.

Nous avons reconnu ce triste chapitre de notre histoire. Nous avons répudié le raisonnement qui se trouvait derrière cette période qui a blessé beaucoup de gens, profondément.

We acknowledged that sad chapter in our history. We repudiated the thinking that lay behind it. And, we went beyond symbolism.

We took concrete action to settle the claims of those who had been injured. That ladies and gentlemen, concrete action, has been our election promise to First Nations people in 2004, in 2006, in 2008 and in 2011.

And to those commitments, we have been faithful.

En plus des excuses présentées pour les pensionnats et l'accord d'indemnisation, notre gouvernement a aussi, par exemple, accéléré le règlement de plusieurs revendications.

For example, our Government has addressed historic grievances by accelerating the settlement of both comprehensive and specific claims.

In concert with the Assembly of First Nations, our historic new process has allowed more than 65 specific claims, previously held up for decades to be dealt with thus far.

We have extended the full protection of the Canadian Human Rights Act, to First Nations Canadians living on reserves.

As Conservatives, we seek to promote the full participation of First Nations in Canada's political and economic life, with all its rights and responsibilities.

And we are dealing with things that have been in the talk-shop for 20 years, in some cases longer than that.

We are, for instance, about to ensure that the property of First Nations women and children are protected when relationships end.

We have tabled bills to strengthen First Nations governance, with 21st century rules on elections and transparency.

Many First Nations people will say it's about time.

Nous avons versé aux communautés des Premières Nations plus d'un milliard de dollars dans le cadre du Plan d'action économique...

We routed more than a billion dollars of Economic Action Plan funding to investments for Aboriginal and northern communities ... using one-time stimulus money to accelerate the building of new homes, and water and waste-water systems, to improve living conditions.

And soon, we shall secure water-system accountability, through legislated standards.

In the name of self-government, we have devolved land and resources from Ottawa to Inuvialuit.

To protect children, we have brokered six child and family services agreements between Ottawa, First Nations and provincial governments.

Et, bien entendu, nous avons signé la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones !

And, of course, we endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People!

This reaffirms our aspiration and our determination to promote and protect the rights of indigenous people at home and abroad.

These things we have done, Ladies and Gentlemen, as a downpayment on what we wish to achieve.

Parce que nous visons l'autosuffisance des citoyens et l'autonomie des communautés.

For our goal is self-sufficient citizens and self-governing communities.

Our goal is to promote improved governance.

Our goal is much increased aboriginal participation in the economy and in the country's prosperity.

And we have no illusion about the enormous work that lies ahead of us.

Les actions et les réalisations de notre gouvernement au cours des six dernières années témoignent du sentiment d'urgence qui nous anime .. Mais, laissez-moi vous dire ceci : ce n'est qu'un début.

Our Government's actions and accomplishments during the last six years speak to our sense of urgency.

But, I can tell you this: we have only just begun.

In terms of participation, standard of living and quality of life the time has come for First Nations to fully share with other Canadians from all walks of life ... in an equal opportunity to find the dignity of gainful employment and more than that, the ability to raise a family in the security that comes with it.

This is our goal as the government, For all Canadians.

And where it is not working for First Nations, we must act, act aggressively, and act together.

Cela m'amène à parler du « Plan d'action conjoint Canada-Premières Nations.

Un plan adopté l'an dernier par le gouvernement du Canada, et l'Assemblée des Premières Nations. Il s'agit d'une entente opportune, fondée sur des objectifs et des principes communs.

That brings me to the "Canada-First Nation Joint Action Plan," agreed last year between the Government of Canada, and the Assembly of First Nations.

This is a timely understanding, based upon common goals and shared principles. Principles such as respect and transparency. Goals like the empowerment of individuals, strong, sustainable communities and economic development.

I call it timely, because there has never been a better moment to build on what we have achieved ... to move forward, to reset the relationship ... to learn from the past, but to focus on the future.

Le Plan d'action conjoint trace la voie à suivre, au moyen d'engagements communs ... des engagements qui vont changer efficacement les règles régissant les relations au chapitre de l'éducation, de la reddition de comptes, du développement économique et des traités.

The Joint Action Plan points the way ahead, through specific joint commitments ... commitments that will effectively change the rules in education, accountability, economic

development and treaty relationships.

Why would we wish to change the rules?

Because “from the rules you set, come the results you get.” And the incentives buried in the Indian Act self-evidently lead to outcomes that we all deplore.

To be sure, our Government has no grand scheme to repeal or to unilaterally re-write the Indian Act:

After 136 years, that tree has deep roots ... blowing up the stump would just leave a big hole.

However, there are ways ... creative ways, collaborative ways, ways that involve consultation between our Government, the provinces, and First Nations leadership and communities ... ways that provide options within the Act, or outside of it, for practical, incremental and real change.

Voilà notre approche, remplacer certains éléments de la Loi sur les Indiens par des dispositions et des procédures plus modernes, en partenariat avec les provinces et les Premières Nations.

C'est une approche qui s'est déjà révélée prometteuse. Certaines bandes qui ont déjà fait des progrès remarquables.

So that will be our approach, to replace elements of the Indian Act with more modern legislation and procedures, in partnership with provinces and First Nations.

It is an approach that has already shown promise.

With inspired leadership, energy and enterprise, some bands have already shown that First Nations people are as quick to prosper, as capable of excellence and as able to enjoy all that Canada's vibrant economy has to offer them.

I think of B.C.'s Haisla First Nation, partners in the massive Kitimat LNG project that will deliver training, employment and rich economic and social benefits to the community for decades to come.

Or the Alberta First Nations, whose band-owned companies, do hundreds of millions of dollars a year in business with oil sands producers, employing thousands of aboriginal people in skilled, high-paying jobs.

Or in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Mi-aw-puk-ek First Nation, which has developed a unique job creation program for unemployed community members, operating in surplus despite having few revenue sources of their own.

Ou au Québec la Première nation d'Essipit a su développer ses industries, en tourisme et dans la pêche commerciale, créant ainsi des emplois locaux et des partenariats tant avec le privé qu'avec les municipalités voisines.

Je pense que nous pouvons faire encore plus que ce que nous imaginons ou croyons possible en ce moment.

However, none of us, not governments, not First Nations communities, not aboriginal individuals can accomplish these things alone and without the others.

In past conversations, we have talked about symbolism and respect and trust

Certainly, in the past, lack of trust on both sides has held us back.

But this is a new day. New generations are arising, generations that seek a common vision, that have common goals.

Et, la plus grande marque de respect que nous pouvons présenter aux hommes et aux femmes des Premières Nations c'est de leur fournir les outils dont ils ont besoin, de leur reconnaître les capacités nécessaires et de leur permettre d'aller de l'avant.

And, the greatest respect that we can show to First Nations men and women to provide them with the tools, to credit them with the capacity and then allow them to move forward.

We all need to move forward.

So let us be willing partners.

Let us renew the conversation.

I look forward to your deliberations.

Eek-so-ka-Pee

Merci beaucoup, mes amis.

Thank you, Friends.

AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo:

We are gathered here on an historic day – an historic day in the midst of urgent needs and demands on us all.

On behalf of our First Nations leaders here and across Canada, we greet the Crown in the spirit our ancestors, with sincerity and with the pride of all of our Indigenous Nations, at this Gathering of our leaders and yours re-calling our earliest interactions.

(Nuu chah nulth)

Let us begin, the way our people do, by acknowledging this territory, Algonquin territory. Meegwetch to Elder Bertha Commonda and the leaders of the Algonquin nation here. It was the Algonquins who greeted newcomers to their lands on the shores of the Ottawa River in front of us here. Bertha and today's Algonquin Chiefs carry forward that tradition of leadership.

Their Excellencies, Governor General David Johnston and Mrs. Johnston's presence are an essential feature of our gathering. It reflects the solemn commitments made to uphold the Honour of the Crown. Your participation recalls the sacred alliance between our ancestors, the leaders of the First Nations and the British Crown.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper let me express my personal thanks to you for the leadership you have shown in making this historic Gathering possible. Together all the leaders here gathered – the Ministers, Members of Parliament, Senators and the hundreds of First Nations Chiefs – are making a solemn and public commitment to our people and to all Canadians to this new beginning. We must not fail.

Today must mark the beginning of renewal – the beginning of realizing our shared potential foretold in the visions of our ancestors. But the proof of our commitment will begin tomorrow, and in the weeks and months ahead, demonstrating that this time, this generation of leaders, will not fail to make the changes we all know are urgently needed.

I understand that there will be some who regard today's events with scepticism. I know there will be Canadian and First Nations people who will see this as merely another event promising much and delivering little. I understand those feelings, I respect that scepticism. It would be disrespectful of the suffering of our peoples over two centuries of agreements followed by broken promises, if I did not.

There will be others who say, why do you need this meeting? Why not just get on with it?

My answer is very simple – because first we must repair the trust that has been broken. To renew the partnership we need to rebuild the trust on which it must be based.

It is up to us – to all of us – to ensure that this time we deliver new hope and new opportunity, not the bitter ashes of disappointment to our peoples. I pledge myself to the task, to the hard work ahead, to full acceptance of the responsibility and accountability that First Nations have in this new beginning. I respect the commitment made by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government of Canada. We have made promises in public today before all our peoples. Their disappointment, if we were to fail to win real progress, would be powerful and understandable.

Today's Gathering reminds that our leaders then had the courage and the wisdom to fight for a vision – a better future delivered through partnership and alliance. Our Treaties are the sacred proof of that vision and that shared commitment.

On a day such as this it is important to recall those leaders and their courage.

Indigenous Nations were powerful – politically, economically and militarily. Our Nations were sovereign and recognized as such. Leaders of our Nations AND those from Europe approached these relations with openness, confidence and conviction to secure our collective futures. First Nations communities stood shoulder to shoulder with newcomers. We ensured their survival through our generosity and sharing our wisdom of the land.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 built on decades of Treaty making in the East, codified the Crown's obligations and established Treaty making as an essential requirement for obtaining access to our lands, to our resources. The Royal Proclamation was a direct result of concern over Pontiac's rebellion and the need to assure Indigenous Nations that our land rights would be secure under the British Crown.

It is no exaggeration to say that without the courage and military skills of First Nation leaders and warriors in the War of 1812 that followed, Canada might be a very different place today. Our ancestors were central to every campaign and to the ultimate victory.

Among the many breaches of that commitment was the Indian Act in 1876. Built on the disgraceful premise of our inferiority, aimed at assimilation and the destruction of our cultures – it was a complete abrogation of the partnership between respectful nations. Largely unchanged, it remains a painful obstacle to re-establishing any form of meaningful partnership.

It is well past time that we began to undo the damage that Act has inflicted on our peoples, and to our partnership. For, from it grew the reserve system, the tragedy of residential schools and offensive prohibitions on our cultural and spiritual practices, a breach of faith that has devastated families and communities ever since. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded over 15 years ago, this legislation has utterly failed our people – and failed Canada.

Despite those attacks on our history, our culture and on the partnership of Treaty peoples – our Nations, our peoples fought on. We continued to support Canada when its survival was under threat.

First Nation soldiers were among the first and the most courageous fighting in every major conflict Canada has fought – and this continues today.

Indeed, it was those very veterans who forged our First Nation organizations including the Assembly of First Nations over forty years ago. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth has affirmed our Treaty relationship. She said, "You may be assured that my Government of Canada recognizes the importance of full compliance with the spirit of your Treaties". Justice Lord Denning, during the constitutional patriation debates, affirmed the integrity and durability of the First Nation - Crown relationship. The 1982 Constitution Act again underlined this historic partnership, including the recognition and affirmation of treaty and inherent rights, as the supreme law of the land. This year marks the 30th anniversary. Rather than an empty box, the Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed section 35 as a "solemn commitment that must be given meaningful content". It is imperative that we move forward on this basis – the basis of recognition and affirmation not denial and extinguishment.

The historic Apology, made possible by the leadership of Prime Minister Harper set the course for reconciliation – a journey together that helped enable today’s gathering.

My own late grandmother, with whom I witnessed the apology, turned to me and said, “... Grandson they are beginning to see us.” With the usual clarity and wisdom of our Elders – she summed up the challenge and foretold the work before us.

Just two years ago, Canada endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. Canada’s endorsement must be taken with full sincerity and must take us forward on the path to reconciliation.

And this work we will undertake together cannot wait.

We need only to look to Attawapiskat, Marten Falls, Pikangikum, and St. Theresa Point – among dozens of other communities, on reserve and in our cities, to see the impact of broken promises, the pain of broken lives, the tragedy of lost opportunity. Our people cannot wait.

They insist that we stop lurching from crisis to crisis. They ask us to begin anew, to re-build understanding and trust as the way forward.

Indigenous Nations have come together to support one another. Shuswap Grand Chief George Manuel advanced the critical connections between Indigenous peoples – across Canada and around the World.

He forged shared vision among First Nations throughout Canada including the monumental campaign to oppose the 1969 white paper. Forty years ago, under his leadership, First Nations called for ‘Indian control of Indian education’.

Today, we stand firm in our convictions and take this vision forward.

I see it in the eyes of our young leaders fighting for change. I hear it in the words of support and encouragement from Canadians in all walks of life – including those of faith groups who have told us they are praying for us today. And I am hopeful in the commitment of our Crown partner to gather with us to begin this important dialogue.

I see it in the work of our leaders who have broken through the barriers of the past to develop exciting new plans in education, health and economic opportunity.

At the center, though, remain our Treaties and our relations, just as they did centuries ago. Respect for and sincere implementation of our Treaty and inherent rights and our agreements is the foundation on which we must build.

Collectively, First Nations leaders made education our top priority. Our kids, just like every Canadian family’s children, deserve good schools. That’s basic, that’s proof of respectful partnership.

We are committed to financial accountability yet this must be mutual accountability from the Government as well. Former Auditor General Sheila Fraser undertook 32 audits related to First Nations. She concluded that the quality of life conditions had actually gotten worse after her decade of study.

Our people can make an enormous contribution to Canada if we tackle these obstacles. Our people are the youngest, fastest growing community in a Canadian labour force that is rapidly aging. Closing the education and employment gaps for our people would contribute 400 billion dollars to the national economy and save 115 billion in expenditures.

Many of our communities are already moving forward, taking economic matters into their own hands, in sectors like clean energy and technology.

Like a rock that sits in the middle of the road – a boulder that blocks the path of collaboration – remains the Indian Act – along with the age-old structures and policies that administer it and steadfastly resist change.

Today First Nations look to smash this status quo in tangible ways – seeking support for our pursuit of self-determination not the limitations of departmentally driven policy and process. We seek fairness and respect for the rule of law and this means recognition of our land rights and title. Policies of denial and extinguishment have no place today and have cost Canada and First Nations billions in legal fees and lost opportunity as claims languish blocking development of both our economies and that of Canada.

We struggle under layer upon layer of wasteful bureaucratic interference, useless and expensive controls are piled upon our people – squandering tax dollars and frustrating change. Now, we must turn this around – increase the rate and pace of change so that all First Nations children can achieve success.

We see today's Gathering as only the first step in a commitment to a re-newed relationship. Next must come new fiscal relationships that guarantee and deliver sustainable, equitable services based on mutually agreed standards and shared responsibility.

We need to build new structures and processes that affirm our relationship and uphold our responsibilities to one another. Structures that guarantee our ability to make the decisions that affect our lives and our lands – agreements that allow us, and the Government of Canada to assume their responsibilities.

Today our young entrepreneurs – together with partners, can generate the economic levers that rebuild our economies. At the same time, we must not forget the basic needs that touch families most closely. As neighbours, we must all find a sense of community and extend a helping hand.

So I can say with confidence, with certainty that our work and the vision of our ancestors is not only possible – it is underway.

If we do our work here together, seriously and sincerely, if we follow it up with shared

commitment to maintain and monitor progress toward the goals we set out here, we will make that transformation.

This is Our Time. Our time to press forward, push harder, to make real change.

This is a struggle for the most vulnerable among us. This is a struggle for First Nation children from coast to coast to coast.

Our success will be Canada's success. Our future is Canada's future.

The step we take today, recalling the words of my late grandmother – an ability to see one another – is the first step. This, recognition, opens all possibilities.

The possibility of a renewed dialogue, as partners. A dialogue that honours who we are as nations and honours the spirit and intent of our Treaties. A partnership that realizes the potential of Canada – a country founded on partnership and respect.

We made this country together. We can re-make it in the spirit, and the vision of our ancestors.

I invite all Canadians to join us. Let us ensure, at this historic moment, we do begin to re-build trust, to renew faith, and to re-construct the partnership of nations, so courageously forged by our ancestors centuries ago.

In closing, I paraphrase our collective ancestors, more wise than us, upon concluding their agreement of friendship and alliance. As depicted in the gift we presented today – they took up a silver chain to represent the bond created and said “if ever that Chain should tarnish, slip or break, we must together brighten and strengthen it anew”. This must be our collective pledge to move forward in strength and support to create a better day for our children and all of Canada.

Mr. Prime Minister, First Nations are ready to meet this challenge. We need and want Canada to work with us.

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