

Progress in Negotiating Land, Resources and Self-government Agreements

Mr. Speaker, national interest in a new relationship with Indigenous people is at an all-time high across Canada. We welcome that interest, and we invite Canadians to look North for a successful model of how to do that. The Government of the Northwest Territories has decades of experience working in partnership with Aboriginal governments to promote the best interests of Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents. We already know how to share jurisdiction, while respecting each other's rights and responsibilities. Canada does not need to reinvent the wheel; we are happy to share our wheel with them.

For 42 years the Government of the Northwest Territories has worked to establish government-to-government relations with Aboriginal governments. Our government is a partner to all six settled agreements and continues to participate actively in ongoing negotiations. We are committed to the full implementation of settled agreements and we continue to strengthen our relationship with Aboriginal governments through formal mechanisms like the intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment in its mandate to work to resolve outstanding land, resources and self-government agreements during the term of our government. I would like to update Members and the public on the work our government is doing to fulfill that commitment.

Concluding these agreements and bringing increased certainty to land and resource management in the Northwest Territories is one of the most important challenges facing the 18th Legislative Assembly. Over the last year, all parties have made renewed efforts to tackle the remaining challenges and finalize agreements. As a result, I am confident that the 18th Legislative Assembly will see unprecedented success in this area.

Last fall, negotiators completed a full draft of a Self-government Agreement-in-Principle for the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Tulita. The parties are now in the final stages of reviewing and considering the approval of the draft agreement. I am hopeful that negotiators will be in a position to initial the draft Agreement-in-Principle in the coming months, leading to the signing of the agreement this summer.

Similarly, negotiators for the parties have also completed an initial full draft of a Gwich'in Self-government Agreement-in-Principle. Consultations with other potentially affected Aboriginal parties are complete, and negotiators will be arranging to meet to address any final issues and complete a final draft of the Agreement-in-Principle. The parties will then be in a position to consider approving the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, negotiators for the parties have also completed a full draft of a Self-government Agreement-in-Principle for the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Norman Wells. Each party is currently reviewing the draft agreement and consultations with other potentially affected Aboriginal parties are expected to commence soon.

I am also pleased to report that having only just signed the Agreement-in-Principle in July of 2015, negotiators for the parties are working on the last few remaining issues to complete a full draft of an Inuvialuit Self-government Final Agreement.

Self-government negotiations with the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Colville Lake have also begun and are looking at innovative approaches to expedite the completion of an Agreement-in-Principle. Similarly, self-government negotiations have had a promising start with the Sahtu Dene and Métis of Fort Good Hope.

Final Agreement negotiations with the Acho Dene Koe First Nation of Fort Liard and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation have reached the point where key decisions on the central aspects involving settlement lands and land quantum and the approach to

governance are before them. We hope the flexible and innovative approaches developed by the Government of the Northwest Territories will help parties quickly move to completed Final Agreements.

Over the coming months, the GNWT will continue to work hard to ensure that the momentum at these negotiating tables, along with all others that have been progressing well, are maintained so that Final Agreements are concluded as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, while the GNWT has seen success in several negotiations, other processes have not moved as quickly as we would like. To address some of the challenges, the GNWT has been implementing a more flexible and adaptive approach to advancing outstanding land claims in the Northwest Territories. Recognizing that not all negotiation processes face the same issues or challenges, approaches have been identified for each of the GNWT's ongoing negotiations. Where appropriate, new direction has been provided in an effort to reinvigorate and reinforce relationships.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment in its mandate to establish a joint committee between Cabinet Ministers and Regular Members to share information and discuss approaches on the advancement of land, resources, and self-government agreements as well as initiatives to enhance relationships with Aboriginal governments.

As Members are aware, the Joint Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Relations and Aboriginal Rights Agreements has been established and held its inaugural meeting this past October. We expect to meet again shortly and I look forward to continuing to work with Members through this committee on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, an important aspect of our new approach was the joint appointment of Ministerial Special Representatives for the Dehcho and the South Slave by me and Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett. The two

Ministerial Special Representatives have been tasked to talk to all of the parties involved in negotiations in these two areas, including the Dehcho First Nations, the Akaitcho and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, and provide advice to myself and Minister Bennett on any issues or roadblocks that continue to stand in the way of settling claims in these regions. I am hopeful that the advice of the Ministerial Special Representatives will highlight opportunities that will lead to breakthroughs and ultimately result in agreements. We are awaiting the final reports from both Ministerial Special Representatives and expect they will guide us in both developing new flexible approaches and allow us to table new proposals that will put us back on the path towards agreements for these negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, our territory is built on partnerships and collaboration. A prime example of this occurred on September 1, 2016 with the Délı̨ne Final Self-government Agreement coming into force and the creation of the Délı̨ne Got'ı̨ne Government. This significant milestone was achieved by governments working together and resulted in a made in the North model for implementing the inherent right of self-government that follows the vision that the Elders and leaders of Délı̨ne have held to for many years. This model of governance is unique in Canada and reflects our commitment to develop new and innovative ways to implement Aboriginal rights.

Decisions about how the land and resources of the Northwest Territories are used and managed are central to the health of our communities, our economy and our environment. Concluding these agreements is an essential step towards providing certainty on how land in the NWT can be used for economic development, conservation, recreation and, traditional activities. The GNWT remains committed to doing its part to finalize land, resources and self-government agreements as quickly as possible in a manner that is fair, balanced and continues to promote workable and affordable agreements that respect Aboriginal rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.