

RECEIVED MAR 27 2017

Ministre des Affaires
autochtones et du Nord



Minister of Indigenous and
Northern Affairs

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H4

MAR 22 2017

The Honourable Perrin Beatty, P.C.
President and Chief Executive Officer
The Canadian Chamber of Commerce
420-360 Albert Street
OTTAWA ON K1R 7X7

Dear Mr. Beatty:

This is in response to your letter of December 14, 2016, outlining the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's renewed national policy mandate for the next three years, and the Chamber's recommendations for moving forward on issues related to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

As you rightly note, the Government of Canada is committed to a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership. This commitment centres on the long-shared objective of reconciliation between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, as well as between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians. However, the Government also recognizes that Canada cannot meaningfully move forward on reconciliation without first taking steps to close the socioeconomic gaps and to help create opportunities for greater self-determination by Indigenous Peoples, and the \$8.4 billion we are investing through Budget 2016 is a significant step in that direction.

Businesses' Role in Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

On May 10, 2016, I made a statement before the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York City, announcing Canada's full support, without qualification, for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Government of Canada will be engaging with Indigenous Peoples, provinces and territories, industry, and other parties, on issues of importance to them, as well as the Declaration more broadly; this engagement will inform the development of an Action Plan to implement the Declaration in accordance with Canada's Constitution.

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The Government will not unilaterally pass legislation to implement the Declaration, but will engage with Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders on how best to implement it. At its core, the concept of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is about meaningful consultation with Indigenous Peoples on issues of concern to them with a goal of achieving consensus. This is about government, Indigenous communities and industry striving toward consensus and there are many examples where this is occurring. James Anaya, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, has stated that seeking the consent of Indigenous Peoples should not be interpreted as a 'veto' outright, but as the objective of consultation.

Recommendation #92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report calls upon the corporate sector to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles to activities involving Indigenous Peoples. As you are aware, the Government of Canada has committed to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and it will be a key element which informs the development of a Canadian framework on reconciliation.

We agree that Canadian businesses have a strong role to play in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and we believe that the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and its members across the country are well placed to participate in the development of a framework to guide our efforts. Meaningful engagement and discussion between the Indigenous Peoples, business and governments will be required to develop this Framework. I am very interested in hearing your views on how the corporate sector is working towards reconciliation efforts by building and maintaining partnerships with Indigenous Peoples. I am also interested in concrete best practices that demonstrate the good work being led by the private sector.

Addressing Barriers to Indigenous Participation in Canada's Economy

We are taking important steps as we speak to accelerate the negotiation of comprehensive land claims with Indigenous groups. Last March, the Government of Canada, the province of British Columbia and the First Nations Summit concluded a Multilateral Engagement process that focused on improving the British Columbia Treaty Process, specifically to expedite negotiations and promote financial efficiency, and the resulting recommendations are in the process of being implemented. Also, since December 2015, we have been engaging in exploratory discussions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis groups to discuss new ways to better address their rights, needs and interests, including innovative approaches to advancing land claims issues that have been significant barriers to advancing negotiations in the past. Further, the Government of Canada continues to negotiate Consultation Protocols with interested Indigenous groups to clarify consultation processes. To date eight Consultation Protocols have been concluded and are in use, with several others currently being negotiated.

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples share in Canada's prosperity. We are also committed to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are consulted and engaged in a meaningful way. Budget 2016 has committed \$16.5 Million over three years to strengthen the Government of Canada's environmental assessment process and to enhance Indigenous participation in consultations on major natural resource projects.

In addition, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada is working in close collaboration with key partners such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the Assembly of First Nations, and Indigenous Works to address the barriers and gaps impacting overall participation of Indigenous businesses in the Canadian economy. For example, with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the Department is working on a National Economic Development Strategy, a multi-year project that aims to identify First Nations business aspirations, current and potential capacity, opportunities and critical challenges to community economic development. This research partnership will be supported by data to deliver actionable information for First Nations communities, businesses, government and corporations to improve socioeconomic outcomes across the country. Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada is also working with Employment and Social Development Canada, and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, to support Indigenous Works to address labour market issues and promote the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian workforce.

On February 22, 2017, Prime Minister Trudeau announced the establishment of a new and important working group of ministers who will be tasked with reviewing federal laws, policies, and operational practices related to Indigenous Peoples and their rights. This review will include legislative, policy and operational practices that have acted as barriers to Indigenous economic growth. It is anticipated that this working group will work with a broad range of partners and experts, including the private sector, to assess and recommend what statutory changes and new policies are needed to best meet our constitutional obligations and international commitments to Indigenous Peoples. I encourage your members to participate in these discussions as they unfold.

Ring of Fire

The Government of Canada sees the Ring of Fire region as holding important socioeconomic potential for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Northern Ontario, and for Canada as a whole. We are therefore working collaboratively with the Province of Ontario, industry, community partners and Indigenous Peoples, to address priority community needs in the region, recognizing that improved community wellbeing is a necessary prerequisite to advancing sustainable resource development. Since 2010, the federal government has taken a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to supporting the Ring of Fire development, with over 15 departments and agencies working collaboratively with provincial and First Nations partners to prioritize investments and coordinate our activities.

The Ring of Fire continues to be a priority for the Government of Canada, specifically in the areas of regional infrastructure development and socioeconomic benefits for First Nations. My colleague the Honourable Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, and I are working with Matawa First Nations and Ontario on broadband, all-season roads, and regional and community economic development. We are also working closely with Matawa First Nations and the Government of Ontario to implement Budget 2016 investments in housing, education, and drinking water to close the gap in quality of life outcomes. Through the Strategic Partnerships Initiative program, the federal government continues to support Matawa First Nations' readiness to participate in and benefit from regional economic development opportunities in the Ring of Fire, and under our Community Wellbeing Pilot Project, we have partnered with three remote Matawa First Nations, the Province of Ontario, and others, to accelerate improvements in individual and community wellbeing. My colleague, the Honourable Jim Carr, Minister of Natural Resources, is also collaborating with his provincial counterpart in advancing mineral development in the Ring of Fire. Specifically, Natural Resources Canada is investing in research and innovation to support the sustainable production of chromite and other mineral resources in the area.

Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Communities' Transportation Infrastructure

Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada funds Climate Change Preparedness in the North and First Nations Adapt, two programs aimed at supporting the capacity of Indigenous communities, northern governments and Indigenous organizations to address climate change priorities in the North, as well as First Nation communities' on reserve. Both programs aim to build community resilience to climate change impacts and to build capacity within communities to adapt to climate change. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada collaborates with provincial and territorial governments, communities and Indigenous organizations to identify priorities and provide direct funding support to assess the impacts of climate change that affect them and develop plans to address these risks. I would invite you to contact the managers of these programs to explore how they can help address your concerns related to seasonal transportation infrastructure in Indigenous and northern communities.

In closing, I want to thank the Canadian Chamber of Commerce for its commitment to working with my colleagues and I toward renewing the relationship with Canada's Indigenous Peoples, and toward ensuring they can contribute to and benefit from increased socioeconomic prosperity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Carolyn Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carolyn" and the last name "Bennett" clearly distinguishable.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett, M.D., P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable Jim Carr, P.C., M.P.
The Honourable Navdeep Bains, P.C., M.P.