



## CROWN-FIRST NATIONS GATHERING

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JANUARY 24, 2012

On December 1, 2011 the Prime Minister officially confirmed the Crown - First Nations Gathering would take place in Ottawa, on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

### What is it?

This Gathering will take place with representatives of the Crown - the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet - and First Nations. The Crown-First Nation Gathering is aimed at re-setting the relationship between First Nations and the federal government. It is the first meeting for Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the collective First Nation leadership. The gathering builds directly on the historic statement of apology, the endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as collaborative efforts like the Specific Claims Tribunal and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Crown-First Nation Gathering creates the potential to take the next step forward in our relationship and advance a forward-looking agenda.

### How did this come about?

This meeting has come directly from a call by First Nations leadership. At our 2010 Annual General Assembly, Chiefs expressed the need for a meeting with the Crown to discuss our issues. The Prime Minister committed to this gathering in a letter released in December 2010 during our Special Chiefs Assembly. In June 2011, the Canada-First Nations Joint Action brought forward First Nation mandated direction with commitment to address immediate priorities including education, treaty implementation, policy reform in key areas like comprehensive claims as well as specific measures to support First Nation governments and economies. The Action Plan also referenced work to advance and confirm a Crown-First Nations Gathering. The National Chief met with the Prime Minister on December 1, 2011 and announced confirmation of the meeting for January 24, 2012.

### What is the agenda?

The agenda for the Gathering will involve: ceremony marking and affirming the historic, enduring relationship; opportunity to identify challenges and mark progress, with First Nation delegations able to make presentations either on site or by video conference; and a concluding session that will aim to set a future agenda.

### What will happen?

During the December 2011 Special Chiefs Assembly in Ottawa, a special session was held to gather ideas and approaches for the Gathering. Some details remain to be confirmed and a series of Communiques (this being the first) will be developed to share information as it becomes available. One immediate outcome of the discussion during the Special Chiefs Assembly is convening an advance session for First Nations to come together in Ottawa on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

This pre-gathering day will assist in organizing efforts for delegations and speaking opportunities.

# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

The format of the Crown-First Nation Gathering includes:

**Part One:** Ceremony reflecting and affirming the enduring relationship between First Nations and the Crown as well as confirming the heritage and future of Indigenous peoples' as fundamental to Canadian reality, identity and culture.

**Part Two:** Addresses by First Nation and Crown leadership

**Part Three:** Concurrent sessions on agreed-upon topics to maximize opportunity for submission for the First Nation delegations to present its views and to dialogue with members of Cabinet, caucus and federal officials as designated. The themes for the sessions would include:

- Strengthening the Relationship and Enabling Opportunities (Treaties, rights, governance, jurisdiction, title, etc.)
- Unlocking the Potential of First Nation Economies (economic development, partnerships, land issues)
- Realizing the Promise of First Nations Peoples (education, health, safe and secure communities, etc.)

**Part Four:** Summary to conclude concurrent session and setting a forward looking agenda

## **What are the outcomes?**

In many ways we are looking to all First Nations to help shape the outcomes. One immediate result is that we want to see such gatherings continue as part of our ongoing relationship with the Crown. We do expect and anticipate some immediate outcomes from this first gathering, but it is most important that this not be merely a one day event or a simple photo opportunity.

For this first gathering, the agenda will ensure specific and focussed dialogue to move forward on a clear agenda on priorities advanced by First Nations. These are expected to include education, Treaties, building First Nation governments and economies, key policy reform and an overall commitment to engage, consistent with the United Nations Declaration and the spirit of mutual respect and partnership. Ultimately, the AFN is facilitating and providing the space for First Nation governments to directly drive their own agendas for change and progress.

## **How can I participate?**

We have already started to reach out to First Nation leadership to ensure that they can engage with their people and provide their input on the discussion areas. The session at the Special Chiefs Assembly was very productive and will help us move forward on key elements and specific goals for this meeting.

The gathering will take place in Ottawa but the exact location has not been announced. We are preparing for the possibility that not all Chiefs will physically be able to be at the Gathering because of time or space restrictions. We are looking at various options to address this, and ensuring that regional delegations have the opportunity to determine participation and focus of presentation themselves. To be clear: our intent is to ensure this there is every opportunity for participation either in person, through rotating delegations and through participation in designated video conference locations which will be reserved for First Nation leadership.

The Crown-First Nation Gathering itself will have the opening, plenary, key note address and final plenary webcast for all to observe.

# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

As well, ten regional video conference facilities are being identified to provide access to Chiefs to participate and make submissions during the concurrent sessions. The AFN will be working with Regional Chiefs to help identify locations and access for every First Nation across Canada.

## Next Steps

The Assembly of First Nations invites **All First Nations** to participate in this historic meeting. We will be working closely with regional offices to ensure coordination and have encouraged every region to discuss their approach, with particular consideration as to:

- Who would attend the Pre-Gathering planning session in Ottawa on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012;
- Who would attend the Crown-First Nation Gathering on January 24<sup>th</sup>
- Who will attend the regional video conference site and where should this be located?
- Which themes, as mentioned above, would each region prioritize to speak to either in Ottawa or via video-conference?
- Are there written submissions that delegations would like to provide?

**We will require confirmation and registration of First Nation leaders attending any one of these sessions and this will be required by JANUARY 4th, 2012.**

More information will be coming forward in the days and weeks to come. We will be launching a dedicated website very soon to provide you all the latest information as it is confirmed. A designated contact and email address [cfng@afn.ca](mailto:cfng@afn.ca) will also be available for you to ask questions or provide comments.

I want to assure you that our goal is to be as inclusive as possible and we will provide every opportunity and avenue for you to be part of this important work. We want you and your region to discuss your priority issues and actions needed to address those priorities. We want to maximize the time we have to ensure effective, constructive and productive engagement.

We will be vigilant. We will be ready. We will look to take an important and significant step forward in our relationship and our agenda with the Crown.

Until the next update, I want to wish you a safe and happy holiday season!