

MAKWA INTERNATIONAL:

An Inter-Indigenous Venture Preparing for Flight

Blaine Favel, Counsellor on International Indigenous Issues for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, has made it his mission to help inter-Indigenous projects get off the ground and gain access to the international market. Makwa International's project to manage Caribbean pine forests in the Atlantic region of Nicaragua is the kind of business development project that Mr. Favel is looking at.

The company is a joint venture created by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) of Saskatchewan and the Corporación Indígena para el Desarrollo Económico (CIDE s.a.) of Nicaragua.

The partnership is based on the belief that alliances between Indigenous peoples are necessary for the survival of future generations. In order to survive, First Nations peoples must compete and in order to compete, they

have to enter the international market. Countries like Nicaragua, emerging from civil war, are in particular need of projects that generate economic and social development that in turn strengthen reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The forestry initiative is at an advanced planning stage and has received support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Canadian International Development Agency, Industry Canada, and the Inter-American Development Bank, among others. Makwa's initial goal is to establish a small sawmill that would later include a veneer plant. Such investments would lead to the manufacture of value-added items using specialty woods like mahogany and teak, as long as they respect environmental goals.

Nicaragua will receive a direct investment of C\$15 million, money that will create some 150 jobs, skills training and the technology transfer necessary for sustainable resource management. Instituting an intensive reforestation program is expected to increase forest yields to approximately 450 000 cubic metres in 20 years.

Members of the MLTC spent months travelling — often by canoe or riverboat — from community to community in the Miskito region of Nicaragua in order to understand the local people and develop a common vision for development that addresses reinvestment in the area.

Both Makwa partners are committed to finding administrative and financial solutions to implement the project. Already one major Makwa accomplishment has been to clear the way for future inter-Indigenous ventures.

Makwa is the name of a bird that migrates from Central America to Canada. It carries a symbolic meaning for the company name as **Makwa** also means "bird of good fortune".

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photo: MLTC



The goal of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) is to build stable economic and social development programs.

photo: MLTC



Training Indigenous personnel in administrative, technical, financial and leadership roles will be planned, organized and implemented around specific projects according to community priorities.

Makwa