

One achievement which attracted international attention was the Agreement signed between Canada and the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut to create the new territory of Nunavut by the Year 2000. It will be a territory governed by aboriginal people, mainly Inuit, which will cover an area one-fifth the size of Canada. That is, an area larger than many of the countries represented in this Assembly today.

As many of you are aware, Canada has just concluded an extensive process of public consultation of renewing our constitution. What you may not realize is the historic breakthrough which was achieved by aboriginal people in the course of this process.

For the first time in our history, aboriginal leaders representing Canada's four national aboriginal associations joined the Prime Minister, provincial premiers and territorial leaders as direct participants in the process of constitutional renewal. Together at the same negotiating table, they were able to reach unanimous agreement which would have provided for the constitutional recognition of aboriginal people's inherent right to self-government within Canada.

The Government of Canada remains committed to proceeding with Aboriginal self-government within the existing constitutional framework and in accordance with its current policies.

In addition to constitutional discussions, we have been pursuing a non-constitutional approach to a community-based form of self government, as well as tripartite negotiations with aboriginal people living off-reserves, Metis, and the provinces. Within these arrangements, a broad range of activities such as education, health care, justice, economic development, language and culture can be brought within the ambit of aboriginal self-government.

The people of Canada have clearly expressed their wish to see Aboriginal People become our partners in the governance and development of our country. To this end, a Royal Commission on Aboriginal People is conducting an extensive inquiry in hundreds of aboriginal and other communities. It will then make recommendations to parliament on a broad range of economic, social and cultural issues of concern to the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

But we cannot make progress on this or any other issue simply by looking back at past problems and injustices. We must also look forward to the world that we are creating for our children.

Canada intends to help build a better future for children, including indigenous children, through a Partners for Children Fund. This international component of Brighter Futures: Canada's Plan for Children, is the fulfilment of commitments we made at the World Children's Summit. And the needs of indigenous children have been recognized among the priorities of this fund.