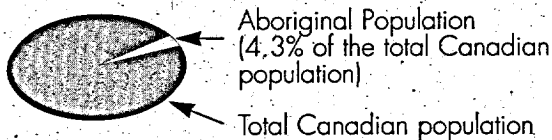


## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Aboriginal people have occupied the territory now called Canada for the past 40 000 years. Many diverse and autonomous Aboriginal nations lived in the territory as hunters and gatherers for most of that time. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, contact with the Europeans began to change traditional Aboriginal ways of life forever. For the next century, governments pursued successive

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION



Source: Statistics Canada, 1991 Census

strategies to assimilate Aboriginal people into the larger non-Aboriginal society. These policies often had the opposite effect, and contributed to decades of political, economic and cultural decline among Aboriginal nations.

However, in the early 1950s Canada began to introduce policies designed to improve conditions for Aboriginal people. Over the next four decades Aboriginal people saw improvements to health and living conditions, local economies and education. Governments also began to transfer ownership and management of land and natural resources. Today, Aboriginal people in Canada have all the civil, legal and political rights enjoyed by other Canadians, as well as Constitutional recognition of their special treaty and Aboriginal rights.

Although conditions for Aboriginal people have improved significantly, much work remains to be done. In recognition of this, the Government of Canada is pursuing a number of initiatives to address outstanding issues and fulfil commitments that have been made to Aboriginal people. The basis for this effort is the Government's pledge, as articulated in the policy document *Creating Opportunity: The Liberal Plan for Canada*, to build a new partnership with Aboriginal peoples that is based on trust, mutual respect and participation in the decision-making process.

## A NEW APPROACH

*"It is time for a change. We must define and undertake together creative initiatives designed to*

*achieve fairness, mutual respect, and recognition of rights."*

Creating Opportunity: The Liberal Plan for Canada  
September 1993

The Government's new approach is to ensure that Aboriginal people have the necessary tools to become self-sufficient and self-governing within the Canadian federation. Toward this end, the Government is working with Aboriginal people to address the obstacles to their development and enable them to marshal the human and physical resources needed to build and sustain vibrant communities.

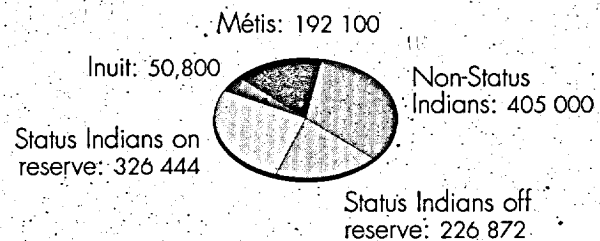
The Government's goal is a future where:

- Aboriginal people enjoy a standard of living and quality of life and opportunity equal to those of other Canadians;
- Aboriginal people live self-reliantly;
- all Canadians are enriched by Aboriginal cultures and are committed to the fair sharing of the potential of their nation;
- Aboriginal children grow up in secure families and healthy communities, with the opportunity to take their full place in Canada.

## WHO ARE THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF CANADA?

Canada's Aboriginal population is estimated at about 1.2 million, or approximately 4.3 per cent of the overall Canadian population of 28 million.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE BY GROUP



Source: Statistics Canada, 1991 Census

The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: *Indians*, *Inuit* and *Métis*. Although they share much in common, these are separate Aboriginal groups with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices, spiritual beliefs and contemporary concerns.