

Statement by Minister on Indian Policy

nature developed between the central government and Indian people. The Indian people should have the right to manage their own affairs to the same extent that their fellow Canadians manage theirs. Under present conditions they do not have anything like this degree of control over their land, their funds, or in fact any of their responsibilities. This is the central fact about conditions today, and it must change.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Opportunities are present today in Canadian society and new directions are open. The government believes that Indian people must not be shut out of Canadian life and must share in these opportunities. The policy is founded on the belief that Canada should be free of discrimination. People must not be kept apart from one another by artificial barriers. The goal of a non-discriminatory society can only be achieved if many ideas change. Change must not be confined to the Indian people; other Canadians must change their attitudes, too. True equality presupposes that the Indian people have the right to full and equal participation in the cultural, social, economic and political life of Canada.

The government believes that the framework within which individual Indians and bands could achieve full participation requires the following:

First, the legislative and constitutional basis of discrimination must be removed.

Second, there must be a positive recognition by everyone of the unique contribution of Indian culture to Canadian life.

Third, services must come through the same channels and from the same government agencies for all Canadians.

Fourth, those who are furthest behind must be helped to catch up.

Fifth, lawful obligations must be recognized.

Sixth, control of Indian lands must be transferred to the Indian people.

The government is prepared to take the following steps to create this framework:

First, to propose to parliament that the Indian Act be repealed and take such legislative steps as may be necessary to enable Indian people to control Indian lands and acquire title to them.

Second, to propose to the governments of the provinces that they take over the same responsibilities for Indians that they have for other citizens in their provinces. The takeover

[Mr. Chrétien.]

would be accompanied by the transfer to the provinces of federal funds normally provided for Indian programs, augmented as may be necessary.

Third, to make \$50 million available over the next five years for economic development in Indian communities and for Indian people.

Fourth, to wind up that part of my department which deals with Indian affairs; the residual responsibilities for the federal government to be transferred to other appropriate federal departments.

The government will appoint a commission to consult with the Indians and to study and recommend acceptable procedures for the adjudication of claims. The commissioner will be appointed soon.

I intend to meet with the executive committees of the Indian associations as soon as possible. I shall seek meetings with the provincial premiers or their representatives in early July. The department will immediately establish a unit of senior personnel who will have no duties other than to consult with Indian people, consult with provinces, consult with other federal departments about the means of implementation and the pace of it. This unit will also consult Indian bands to determine their views on control of their own land—complex questions which offer many alternatives. I hope that we can end the single, separate service agency within five years. I hope the Indian people will agree that this system which sets them apart is no longer useful. This will be the first goal of the implementation group.

The policy proposal will be referred to the Standing Committee of the house where it can be fully discussed. I seek the support of the house for the aims of the policy. I seek the good will, the support and the energy of the Indian people. I seek the support of all Canadians. I seek the co-operation of the provincial governments.

Finally, I want to thank my department, which has supported me in this policy completely and enthusiastically since its inception.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his courtesy in sending me within reasonable time notice that he would be making a statement, and the copy of the statement which accompanied that notice. I hope this permits me to make a reply, keeping well within the framework of the injunction Your Honour laid down the other day.