

encouraged greater respect for First Nations concepts of property and the appropriate treatment of cultural heritage.

There have been advances in the settlement of Aboriginal land claims and in the establishment of self-government, as well as ground-breaking resource-sharing agreements. However, for many First Nations, progress in self-government and land claims has been frustratingly slow. And there continues to be a wide disparity between the quality of life of many Aboriginal people and that of other Canadians.

Aboriginal policy and programs in Canada continue to move forward to address these issues. Prime Minister Paul Martin and the Government of Canada have declared as a major priority the significant improvement in quality

of life for Aboriginal people. A national roundtable on Aboriginal affairs in Canada in the spring represented an unprecedented opportunity for more than 40 members of the federal Cabinet, Senate and House of Commons to engage 70 Aboriginal leaders from across the country and forge a new relationship. Following the roundtable, the Prime Minister called for a series of steps, including the release of a summary report to serve as a blueprint for action, a series of follow-up roundtable sessions and the production of an Aboriginal report card to ensure quantifiable results.

The international agenda

In keeping with its long-standing support of the UN and its concerns about Aboriginal people, the Government of Canada has backed the goal for the Decade, "to strengthen international cooperation to solve the problems faced by Indigenous people" in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

Canada has led or supported a number of national and international projects and initiatives related to the Decade. In 2002, for example, representatives of about 20 Canadian Aboriginal organizations and non-governmental organizations took part in the inaugural meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, one of the Decade's prime objectives. Canada is one of only two countries with two of its nationals, Wayne Lord and



photo: CP (Tom Hanson)

New relationship: Prime Minister Paul Martin takes part in an Aboriginal smudging ceremony before the start of the First Ministers Conference on Health in Ottawa.

Shared history:
Aboriginal teepees set up for a special exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization across from Parliament Hill in Ottawa.



photo: courtesy of Canadian Museum of Civilization