

# UNCED THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to be more of a discussion paper than a brief. Hopefully, it can be used as a basis for evaluating future directions in incorporating the views and experience of indigenous groups into Canada's international follow-up to UNCED. It sets out what Chapter 26 recommends and proposes some additional areas for action. It is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather as a foundation to be built upon. Our objective should be to move towards achieving the objectives of Chapter 26 and to accelerate the progress made through the UNCED process in establishing mechanisms for cooperation between government and indigenous groups on the issues around sustainable development.

Attached to this discussion paper is a briefing note describing the current status of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

## ISSUE

How to translate the provisions of Agenda 21 affecting and involving indigenous people in international activities into a practicable and manageable workplan not limited to Agenda 21 recommendations.

## BACKGROUND

Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 lays out some recommendations on the actions that should be taken by international organizations to incorporate the "values, views and knowledge" of indigenous communities in resource management and other programme areas that affect them. Recommendations are also made on actions by governments with respect to international issues as they affect indigenous communities. At the same time, Chapter 26 contains gaps and weaknesses so that any plan of action should not be limited to the recommendations in Chapter 26 and elsewhere in Agenda 21. The two notable examples are its emphasis on government action at the expense of any discussion on the nature of indigenous communities and the absence of any discussion on how to use and preserve indigenous knowledge to manage resources either by indigenous communities or by government.

Following UNCED, the Department of External Affairs created a portfolio within its Environment Division to address the role of indigenous people in sustainable development. At this early stage, input is needed from indigenous representatives to define the scope and priorities of the Department's institutional response.