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The Ottawa presentation marked an important milestone in Government activities on behalf of Aboriginal exporters in Canada. Following the release of the Aboriginal International Business Development (AIBD) Plan — developed by the 27-member AIBD

equally skilled in many other areas, including the knowledge-based industries that constitute today's global business environment."

Chief Fontaine went on to say that Aboriginal business people are eager to develop a constructive partnership with the Canadian government. He cited the co-operation of two

take advantage of Canadian government programs and services. She recommended trade missions such as NEBS, NEXOS, and especially Team Canada.

Grant was part of the recent Team Canada mission to Japan, where she secured an established representative, formed a partnership with a major Japanese manufacturer, and learned about Japanese tastes and trends in fashion and art.

Steven Bearskin, President of Cree Construction and Development Co. Ltd. in James Bay, also emphasized the value of government programs and services in developing foreign markets.

Cree Construction, one of the largest and most successful construction companies in Quebec, began marketing its products and services five years ago, first in the Philippines through a CIDA-INC project, and then in 1998 as a member of the Team Canada trade mission to Latin America. These international excursions were followed by visits to Poland, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

In keeping with the speakers that preceded him, Bearskin reiterated that "Aboriginal people have the expertise, skill and know-how to compete and succeed in markets throughout the world."

The presentation, hosted by William Clarke, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Business and Chief Trade Commissioner, and with opening remarks by Rob Wright, Deputy Minister for International Trade, was organized by DFAIT's Export Services: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Division. Copies of the Directory of Aboriginal Exporters are available from DFAIT's Enquiries Service (613-944-4000) or by e-mail ([enqserv@dfait-maeci.gc.ca](mailto:enqserv@dfait-maeci.gc.ca)). \*

## New International Business Plan Targets Aboriginal Exporters

Committee co-chaired by DFAIT, Aboriginal Business Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada — and the release of the Directory of Aboriginal Exporters, this was an appropriate time to hear from some of Canada's leading Aboriginal representatives and business people.

Chief Fontaine, whose AFN represents 633 First Nations communities and over 800,000 members, stressed the importance of integrating Canada's Aboriginal population into the country's business and economic culture. "Just as Canadian exporters take great pains to learn about foreign cultures," Chief Fontaine said, "Canada needs to do the same with its indigenous population and businesses."

He applauded the Government for developing the AIBD Plan, and for establishing a database of Aboriginal exporters, as "a good first step" in building a framework for Aboriginal businesses to enter the international trade arena.

"But much more needs to be done," added Chief Fontaine. "Government needs to initiate more Aboriginal trade missions, which have until now been devoted primarily to arts and crafts. Aboriginal business is much more than that."

"We have demonstrated our ability in traditional sectors such as arts, crafts and woodworking, but we are

Canadian Ambassadors — Stan Gooch in Mexico and Peter Boehm at the Organization of American States in Washington — who "have been tremendously helpful in our efforts to develop markets in Latin America and the United States."

Given the opportunity, he explained, Aboriginal businesses can compete with the best in the world. "The spirit of Aboriginal business is not in question," he said, "but its long-term viability is."

This is where co-operation is key — in fostering an environment that allows Canada's Aboriginal business sector the opportunity to demonstrate its entrepreneurial excellence.

Several examples of this excellence followed Chief Fontaine's remarks. Ray Ahenakew, CEO of Meadow Lake Tribal Council in Saskatchewan, touched on the Council's many accomplishments, in particular its forestry company, which is among the top 50 firms in Saskatchewan, and Mystic Management, one of Canada's top environmental companies.

Ahenakew echoed Chief Fontaine's comments by saying that Aboriginal entrepreneurs have much to offer. "We just need to develop and promote this wealth of untapped potential — in Canada and abroad."

Vancouver fashion designer and Haida artist Dorothy Grant encouraged Aboriginal business people to