

*Private Members' Business*

agreement and the northeastern Quebec one, which was signed in 1978, these agreements have allowed native people of that region to improve their standard of living and to better control their own development.

Moreover, with the Cree-Naskapi of Quebec Act, the Cree and Naskapi have been the first native people in Canada to achieve some kind of self-government. Bands administer their lands and the natural resources they are controlling. They maintain the native culture, values and traditions and look after community development.

So, the question is this: Why should the federal government create a new electoral district to better represent the native people of that region when there are systems in place that work properly?

Madam Speaker, I admire the interest the member from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce shows in the aboriginal people. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to create an additional constituency in Quebec.

Much still remains to be done and many of their grievances are legitimate. That is why the prime minister made public, on September 25, an action plan in order to settle some of the issues concerning aboriginal people of Canada.

That action plan is not made up of vain promises. It is a realistic and concrete plan made which has four objectives: to settle territorial claims; to improve economic and social conditions in reserves; to enhance relations between aboriginal people and governments; to bring the concerns of aboriginal people into contemporary Canadian society.

During the last two months, you noticed for sure that this government takes land claims very seriously. We said that nothing was more important than that and we kept our word.

As early as the beginning of October, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and his Minister of State sought the co-operation of a number of native leaders having experience with the process of specific claims.

That group asked for our support in the setting up of a task force to have discussions with aboriginal communities throughout the country. We agreed, and the task force was struck and is chaired by Manny Jules of British Columbia. It should submit a report at the beginning of

December stating its position on a great many subjects concerning specific claims.

We also made progress in other areas. Policy changes were made to allow the negotiation of land claims in British Columbia. We took the necessary steps to ensure that legal obligations contracted over a century ago concerning the transfer of land entitlements to Treaty Indians are respected.

As a matter of fact, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs announced a few weeks ago that the government was willing to negotiate Treaty land entitlement claims in Saskatchewan. Negotiations will be based on the Treaty Commissioner's report. We have already announced similar measures in Alberta and Manitoba.

The second objective of the government's action plan is to improve living conditions on Indian reserves. As we all know, while major progress was made in recent years, living conditions on native reserves are in many cases still lower than those of the majority of Canadians.

We are ready to co-operate with Indian leaders and provincial governments in order to introduce a number of improvements to basic community programs and services, like running water, sewers, sanitary facilities and so on. The government will soon announce concrete plans designed to make life easier in all native communities.

The third objective is to improve the relations between native people and governments, that is to make it possible for our native fellow citizens to have the same opportunities as other Canadians to contribute to the growth and prosperity of our country. This, Madam Speaker, is definitely not an easy task.

I am convinced that real progress in that field can only flow from redefining the legal relation between government and native people.

The Indian Act, very seldom amended since it was enacted in 1876, maintains native people in a situation of dependence on the state. It belittles both natives and non-natives.

Native leaders on the task force to which I referred a moment ago are expected to make their recommendations on that issue in the near future, so we are looking forward to unveiling the first of a series of amendments to the Indian Act early next year.