



News release

Premier stresses basic infrastructure as key to economic development

IQALUIT, Nunavut (May 14, 2001) - Premier Paul Okalik says Nunavut requires basic infrastructure in order to take advantage of its economic potential. Premier Okalik was speaking to his federal, provincial and territorial colleagues responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and leaders of the five national aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg on May 11.

“Our situation is not unlike where the western provinces were at the turn of the last century when there was a decision made to support economic development in that area,” Premier Okalik said. “Canadians north of sixty need a strong foundation to develop economies and foster self-reliance.”

During the meeting, Ministers and Leaders discussed the *Strengthening Aboriginal Participation in the Economy* report. Premier Okalik welcomed the discussion, but pointed out to his colleagues that the report is a step ahead of Nunavut’s needs. He added that the development of Nunavut’s economy also depends largely on meeting the basic needs of Nunavummiut – youth employment, housing and education – and must be the focus of increased federal public investment.

Federal funding programs determined on a per capita basis, such as the infrastructure program, amount to very little for Nunavut.

“Nunavut receives about one-sixteenth of one per cent of the funding,” Premier Okalik said. “How can we begin to catch up with the rest of the country with such little support? Our residents are eager to participate in the economy; we need the tools.”

Premier Okalik urged Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Robert Nault to live up to commitments in the Speech from the Throne to pursue initiatives to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. He also expressed the need for territories and provinces to have a role in the development and implementation of any plans and programs the federal government will develop to achieve this goal.

“Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada where aboriginal people comprise a majority of the population,” Premier Okalik said. “Our needs are very much the needs of aboriginal people.”

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