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Strategies for Indigenous Self-Reliance

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Good morning to you all.

It's a pleasure to be able to participate in this forum. Especially at a time of heightened interest in natural resources and in a province that recognizes the need to work cooperatively with aboriginal people.

The hot commodities market and a commitment to building inclusive relationships with aboriginal partners is a recipe that will benefit stakeholders, shareholders and all Canadians.

Today I would like to speak about interests and opportunity and how we might all benefit.

Sitting beside my two colleagues you can see the past, present and future in developing the vast resources of northern Canada.

Going back to the Bonanza Creek gold rush, which put Dawson City, Yukon on the map in the 1890s, we can see history.

One hundred years later in the 1990's there was the great diamond rush in the Northwest Territories and that is producing revenue today.

The 21st century however belongs to Nunavut. That's not said in a boastful way. I say that because people like those of you in this room are making it so.

Since the creation of Nunavut in 1999 mineral exploration investment has increased from 35-million dollars to 188-million in 2004.

The projection for this year remains well above 150-million dollars positioning Nunavut as the northern leader in exploration investment.

This exploration investment is leading to shovels in the ground and soon we will see Nunavut diamonds and gold in the markets.

The Tahera Diamond Corporation is currently completing construction of its facility and is expected to be in production next year.

There is also the Miramar gold project south of Cambridge Bay and the Meadowbank gold mine north of Baker Lake. Both of these projects are on track to obtain their approvals and I hope they will be able to get their materials and equipment on site by next year.

These are just three of the many projects that are in various stages of development in Nunavut. There is another dozen projects looking at gold, silver, nickel, copper, iron ore and coloured gem stones.

In some cases these projects are being pursued by Vancouver based companies like Stornoway and Cumberland Resources other projects are being led by industry leaders like Teck-Cominco, DeBeers and BHP-Billiton.

Along with the vast and largely untapped mineral deposits Nunavut also has oil and gas. It's estimated that we have up to 15% of Canada's total petroleum reserves, and for better or worse changing environmental conditions will make these resources more accessible.

Since the creation of Nunavut we are in a much better position to transform this vast natural potential into development opportunities.

We are doing this by building a government and a society that is ready and responsive to those who want to share in our wealth.

We are preparing for growth today. We have the lowest personal taxes in the country. We have no sales or capital tax, and our small business and corporate taxes are amongst the lowest in the country.

Along with ensuring you are not overtaxed we are making sure you are not overregulated.

Our government recently struck a task force to comb through our business regulations and to make recommendations on streamlining or eliminating regulatory barriers to business development.

Along with providing a positive business climate our greatest responsibility to those looking to invest in Nunavut is to ensure an educated and skilled population.

So while we tear down barriers to business we are building up our human resources and infrastructure capacities.

Outside of healthcare our greatest government expense is for education. From general education levels to specific training in prospecting and geo-science mapping, we are combining traditional knowledge of the land with modern economic opportunities.

We are also putting the proper economic development infrastructure in place.

We have developed a transportation strategy that includes two major undertakings. In Western Nunavut, we are pushing for the federal government to join with us, Inuit organizations and private investors to develop the Bathurst Inlet Port and Road Project.

This \$216-million transportation system consists of a deepwater port, roads and a barge system. This project would play a major role in encouraging regional mineral development and provide long-term economic benefits to Nunavut and the rest of Canada.

We are also actively encouraging a road that would connect our territory west of Hudson Bay with Manitoba.

Both of these projects would benefit from a more vigorous participation of the federal government and would be consistent with regional economic diversification programs that are available to Eastern and Western Canada.

However, for all our obvious potential riches, we in Nunavut are still waiting for help in this area.

A northern regional development program would also be consistent with the vision that built this country.

Let's remember that this country was built around an infrastructure program called the national railway. By connecting East and West our forbearers built an economy and a country.

We need the strength of a modern national vision that will tie Nunavut and our riches to the to the rest of Canada.

The benefits would be immediate.

We would significantly increase access to mineral deposits; resulting in easier project planning, increased investment certainty, diminished project risk, and reduced capital and operating costs. Of course all of this would ultimately benefit Canada financially and reinforce our northern sovereignty.

I call on all of you here today to help us in pressing the importance of these projects with the federal government.

Just as the NWT has become a positive economic generator for Canada, we in Nunavut have the desire and the resources to contribute rather than draw from the national pocket book.

By far our largest contribution to encouraging business development is the settlement of our land claim. Our agreement remains the largest land claims settlement in Canadian history.

It gave us the institutions of public government so that we could participate in the management and decision-making processes between governments, Inuit and industry.

Most importantly for those of you looking to develop Nunavut's resources it created certainty over land title. This increases investor confidence and includes Nunavummiut in projects that effect our lives.

The Government of Nunavut fully supports the responsible exploration and development of the territories' mineral resources. We expect these developments to be economically viable, environmentally sustainable and beneficial to both investors and the people of Nunavut.

In order to deliver those benefits to Nunavummiut and to meet the needs of industry, we are negotiating with Ottawa for the devolution of authority to regulate and approve projects in our territory.

Whether you are in business or an elected official we have all experienced the frustration of long delays while waiting on federal decision makers. With devolution we will develop a more responsive system that reflects northern realities and aspirations.

No longer will you have to deal with Ottawa for a project in the North. We will develop partnerships directly rather than through federal surrogates who are far from the scene and whose agendas often conflict with our own.

And that really is my message for you today. Nunavut has come of age. We have the resources, we are developing the capacity and will soon have the full authority to be your partners in development.

We are building a territory that welcomes those who will meet us half way. I have come to the Resource Expo today and I hope to see you all in Nunavut tomorrow.

Thank-you.