

Foreword

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PAUL MARTIN

In May 2008, the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto hosted a summit in which I participated. Entitled, *Developing Aboriginal Economies*, the conference focused on the diverse range of the economic challenges confronting Canada's Aboriginal communities. It sought to provide a forum for new ideas and approaches to economic development in Aboriginal communities. Participants and panellists ranged from members of the bar to elected officials to businesspeople and Aboriginal leaders alike.

An exceptional contribution was made by the students who participated. They were members of the *Capstone Class in Aboriginal Economic Development* at the University of Toronto. The students were remarkably knowledgeable and their remarks served to both educate and impress all those in attendance.

I was immediately struck by how considerably more expansive their knowledge was than mine had been at a similar age. My first exposure to the problems faced by Aboriginal Canadians had occurred when I went to work, one summer as a young man, near Winisk on Hudson Bay. We lived in a workers' camp, but there was a Cree community nearby. I was shocked by the appalling conditions typical of reserves. It was only then that I began to understand that there was another set of Canadians who lived in an utterly different world, in which the comforts we considered normal and the opportunities we saw as a birthright did not exist and perhaps could not even be imagined.

Regrettably, the time since lapsed has done little to prompt positive change with regard to the challenges faced by Canada's Aboriginal people. While Canadians continue to have their hearts and consciences tugged by the plight of people in the Third World abroad, the same is not true of those living in Third World conditions at home. The plight of our Aboriginal people is our national shame. It is important for Canadians to understand that Aboriginal Canadians do not want handouts—they want a hand up. They want us to work with them to reverse the legacy of colonial governments that has carried on to this day—a legacy that said, "Assimilation is your only way out and everything we do to achieve that end is justified."

Canadians are a just people. The problem is the majority of us are often simply unaware of the scale of the problems that exist, or the issues have become so obscured by political rhetoric that many know not what to think.

While in office, I endeavoured to move beyond politics and work toward resolving the difficulties facing Aboriginal Canadians. These efforts culminated in the Kelowna Accord, an extraordinary framework agreement achieved by an extraordinary group of people. Kelowna was never designed as a single event, but rather the platform that would ensure ongoing partnership and collaboration, encourage innovation and target solutions and accountability.

None of this was done by federal government fiat or imposition. We recognized, for one of the few times in Canadian history, that no answer can be arrived at by the Crown unilaterally—that answers can only be the work of a partnership between the federal government, provincial and territorial governments and Aboriginal leadership. Incredibly, before Kelowna, a Prime Minister had never sat with his provincial and territorial counterparts and the country's Aboriginal leadership to deal with the issues that lay before us.

We came to an agreement on what had to be done and how. Together we developed a 10-year plan to narrow and eventually eliminate the gaps in outcomes that affect the quality of life of Aboriginal Canadians. We focused on making progress in five crucial areas: education, health, housing, drinking water and economic development.

Tragically, despite this, the Conservative government reneged on Kelowna and in doing so broke the word of the Canadian government to Canada's Aboriginal people. One thing however is immutable—sooner or later the Kelowna approach will be the law of the land.

Since stepping down as leader of the Liberal Party, I have undertaken my own projects with respect to improving the lives of Aboriginal students. One such project is based upon an international program, now spread throughout 14 countries, which addresses the issue of unacceptable high-school dropout rates. The program determined that young people who would otherwise drop out of school will stay enrolled if you give them something concrete to focus on—in this case business. We have developed a pilot project that is 220 hours over two semesters, and a curriculum to teach marketing, accounting and other subjects integral to business success. Beginning with a school in northwestern Ontario, it has now been introduced in schools in three of the western provinces with another to commence, hopefully, soon.

In many ways, Canada's Aboriginal people feel justifiably forgotten. Lack of awareness has been, and continues to be, a huge obstacle that it is necessary to overcome in the battle to ameliorate Aboriginal life. It is only with the awareness of Canadian citizens that the issue will gain broad public

discourse, and citizens will apply sufficient political pressure to provoke governments into change.

The three essays contained in this issue go beyond the materials presented at the Summit on Aboriginal Economic Development. Two of the papers in this issue are contributions from students in a class on *Law, Institutions and Development*. Together, this collection offers much to improve discourse on Aboriginal economic development and does a great service to anyone in government tasked with Aboriginal-oriented policy. The students' work focuses on a variety of issues central to the development of Aboriginal economic independence. Each essay studies an issue and offers insights useful in developing appropriate public policy prescriptions and prompting public discourse. Their work is of great value to anyone seeking to affect change in these areas.

They shed light on the complexities related to Aboriginal economic development. If they make anything abundantly clear, it is that Aboriginal development is not simply limited to securing appropriate levels of funding. Economic development also bears a complex relationship to autonomy.

Judith Rae's paper, entitled "Program Delivery Devolution: Stepping Stone or Quagmire?" impresses both in its thoughtfulness and scope. Judith Rae offers an examination of program delivery devolution in Aboriginal communities, inquiring whether program delivery serves as a transitional tool. While she concludes that local program delivery has produced some tangible benefit, she is critical in so far as the merely administrative control resulting from local program delivery runs the risk of ending up being the default form of local control, instead of true Aboriginal self-government. The social costs of devolution are particularly acute in the context of capped and inequitable funding.

In "Improving the Effectiveness of Transfer Payment Programs on Canadian Reserves: Lessons from International Aid," Andrew Binkley explores ways to improve economic development programs on reserves. In Canada, First Nations on reserve have poorer average health, educational attainment and income than the rest of the population. Governmental programs attempting to close this gap between First Nations on reserve and other Canadians have had mixed results. Drawing on the similarities between the structure of these programs and the structure of international aid provided to developing countries, Andrew Binkley suggests a number of improvements. To increase effectiveness of these funds, he proposes targeted economic development funding and the provision of expertise to assist in good governance. In order to implement these improvements, government would need to be more responsive to conditions on reserve. Like his colleagues, he pinpoints the intricate relationship that exists between self-government and economic dev-

elopment, but suggests that if the relationship between First Nations and the government is restructured, promoting economic development on reserves can be a means to reaching successful self-government.

Jamie Baxter and Michael Trebilcock's paper, "'Formalizing' Land Tenure in First Nations: Evaluating the Case for Reserve Tenure Reform," considers the potential economic outcomes of a proposed First Nations Land Title System for reserve lands. Land reform has been a major topic internationally; for insight, they draw from experiences of Indigenous peoples in the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. They conclude that First Nations communities contemplating land reforms will face many considerations unique to their histories, geography, and social and political realities. Land has been a source of political tension between different levels of Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples—and this context has significant economic dimensions as well.

This is all to say that these authors have done a great service in their writings. We all must work together to make sure that the obstacles facing Canada's Aboriginal people become a thing of the past.