

PROVINCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON JUSTICE AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

THE HONOURABLE ROY ROMANOW

PREMIER OF SASKATCHEWAN

Elders, Senators, Chief Crowe, President Morin, ladies and gentlemen and friends. On behalf of the people and the province of Saskatchewan, I am honoured to extend greetings and welcome to all of those who have come from far and near to attend this very exciting Conference. I think the Conference is going to be both informative and interesting; the large turnout indicates that this is a subject that has widespread interest right across the country.

I first want to pay tribute to Dick Gosse for his hard work in organizing this Conference. During our years together as attorney general and deputy attorney general, Dick contributed to a number of pioneering moves. The Native Court Worker Program, special RCMP policing, and initial studies on Aboriginal justice and justice methods were all launched during that period. These initiatives served our province well, and contributed to the development of the debate over subsequent years.

I'm very pleased to see Mr. Justice René Dussault here as well. My first involvement with René Dussault was when he was minister of Justice in the Quebec government at a time when constitutional interests did not, for the most part, concern themselves with Aboriginal issues. Since that time, Justice Dussault's accomplishments as deputy and jurist, and now as co-chair of the special task force looking into this and other issues, have become well known. His contribution to this forum is going to be very important.

I'd be remiss if I did not single out one other person: the former premier of Saskatchewan, Allan Blakeney, who served on the Dussault Commission. Mr. Blakeney has always demonstrated a strong commitment to the issues you will be defining and debating over the next two days. For example, during the constitutional period of 1981-82, there was intense negotiation over whether section 35—the recognition of Indian, Métis and Inuit rights—would be inserted into the Accord. It was former premier Blakeney's position that no subsequent amendments be made to the Constitution unless and until the provision of section 35 was inserted. He was very much committed to this recognition and his presence here today, together with René Dussault and all of you, guarantees a very successful conference.

Now, I want to say just a few very brief words with respect to the Province of Saskatchewan. We have had a great interest in Saskatchewan in pursuing Aboriginal justice, and especially in trying to define the respective roles of Aboriginal governments, provincial governments and the federal government. Not only is it the right thing to do, but from a very practical perspective, the demographics of Saskatchewan dictate that these rights and obligations must be defined, recognized and confirmed as quickly as possible.

During the course of the Charlottetown negotiations, we conceded, we admitted and we promoted the principle of the inherent right to Aboriginal self-government. We believed in it then, we believe in it tonight and we shall believe in it tomorrow. Of course, we are a long way from realizing this goal, especially with the collapse of Charlottetown; but we in Saskatchewan have decided not to walk away from the collapse of Charlottetown. We have taken some initial steps by establishing formalized structures in our province with the chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Roland Crowe, and with the president of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan, Gerald Morin. And, we've extended an invitation to Ottawa to co-operate in the signing of these bipartite—or, if we're successful, tripartite—arrangements as part of the overall objective of pursuing and recognizing the inherent right of self-government.

As for justice in Saskatchewan, we're implementing, as quickly as we can, the recommendations of Judge Linn; we're implementing pilot projects on a case-by-case basis, and we're re-establishing old programs, like the Native Court Worker Program. Together, these projects indicate our commitment to recognizing, developing and confirming Aboriginal justice in the context of the high principles that all of us in this room share.

So, while Charlottetown is defeated, Aboriginal justice still remains our objective—something the Government of Saskatchewan is committed to achieving. The Government will be carefully following your deliberations and monitoring and assessing your findings and conclusions. They are going to be important for us provincially, and for their influence on the national scene in the months and years ahead as this issue is revisited and finally, albeit somewhat belatedly, brought to successful resolution.

I want to wish each and every one of you success in the very important task ahead of you, and thank you very much for the opportunity to extend welcome and greetings on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.