

GETTING IT TOGETHER

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I want to address briefly the question: "When and how are we going to get it together?" In the words of Chief Poundmaker, we want to participate in "blazing the trail"; we don't want to "sit beside the trail."

One thing I will guarantee you, as we blaze the trail together, is that we do not want to go where we are not wanted. In other words, we will work with Aboriginal people in overcoming some of the challenges and the difficulties and resolving some of the fundamental issues that we have been discussing for the last three days, but we don't want to dominate that conversation. We don't want to impose our will, and we don't want to go where we are not wanted.

In the section on justice models (part VII), Vice-Chief Bellegarde introduced the term "allies" as he talked about some of the things that had to happen. He said that Aboriginal people need allies from all around the system. I thought that was a very appropriate way of putting it because when you come right down to it, Aboriginal people have to do these things themselves. The rest of the system has to work with Aboriginal people, support them and help to make it happen.

God knows we don't know how to do it. We have been trying to do it in this territory for over a hundred years and in Canada for about five hundred years, and we have steadily made the situation worse and worse. The time has come to say, "Enough!" The time has come to do it differently, and Aboriginal people will have to lead us through that particular forest as we work together to blaze the trail.

In the Department of Justice and in the provincial government, we are prepared to work on modifications to the existing system now, and to change the way we do things. At the same time, we are prepared to work on the broader questions of self-government in accordance with the spirit I tried to outline to you in the earlier section on moving toward a separate justice system (part VI). I think I also made clear to you that we have much to learn. There is much that Aboriginal people can teach us. Our minds are open to that. We are prepared to change the way in which we think about many of these fundamental questions when we better understand your points

of view. As I said earlier, this Conference has changed us all. I know that is the case for all participants. We are all the better for it.

I sat at the back of the room today in the session on northern justice issues (part X) and heard His Honour Judge Fafard say things that have been said before, but he said them in a way that for me brought the idea home like a kick in the head when he talked about our "offender-processing system" and our "case-processing punitive system," our "sausage factory" to use another term he used. I heard him say that you can't punish people into behaving like a functional community. Those are very appropriate descriptions. That is what we do, that is what our justice system is doing, and it must change!

At the same time I want to remind you that we can't do this only with the people in this room. We have to do it from the broadest base we possibly can. The Aboriginal leaders in this room have large communities that they must bring with them as we make changes that will require the involvement of communities in a very creative and comprehensive way, so that at the end of the day when we have made the changes that we have to make, the communities believe in them and see them as fundamentally different. They must see the changed system as a system that they can trust, that they can have confidence in, a system that will be credible.

On the government side, we have communities that we must also bring along with us. That is equally as important, because at the end of the day we must have consensus around what we are doing, and we must have broad public support in the Saskatchewan community generally. That will require us to be practical, a word used in a very sensitive and appropriate way by Mary Ellen Turpel. It will require us to be practical. I don't know precisely what that means, but this will become clear to us as we hack our way through the forest and blaze a trail toward the common goal we all share.

In that process, we will give you plenty of space. It is, after all, your space. It is your room. And we must work together to accomplish the objectives that have been stated so eloquently by presenters in this Conference.