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Chair

Mr. Colin Mayes

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Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): I declare open this meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development of Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I move to amend the agenda so that we can immediately debate a motion that I sent out to all members of the committee more than 48 hours ago. It deals with the decision to be made at the next working session of the Human Rights Council. I would like us to be able to debate the motion right away and then hear from the witnesses. I would also point out that we will probably have to adjourn the meeting sooner because of the vote in the House at 5:40 p.m. I, therefore, move to amend the agenda.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

We do have witnesses here who want to be heard, so what is the pleasure of the committee? Do you want to deal with this motion now or at the end, after we hear from the witnesses?

Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Chair, we do have a lot of witnesses here who have come a long way to speak. I prefer to continue with the agenda as written, so as to give them the opportunity to give their deliberations and witness on the matters they have come here to talk about, instead of getting into all of our votes.

The Chair: Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: With all due respect to the Parliamentary Secretary, I made a motion to amend the agenda, and I ask that it be put to a vote so that we can move directly to the main motion accordingly.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I have no difficulty in dealing with the motion. I see the grand chief is not here yet. We might as well move forward with this to maximize our time if the discussion is not protracted on this.

The Chair: Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I would agree that we should go ahead and proceed with the motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Chair, unfortunately the witnesses don't have a say here. It's too bad, because I know they'd likely want to proceed with their discussion. That would be my position, and I think the other members of our party would agree with that position. I would prefer that we maintain our agenda as written and proceed with the motions at the end of the meeting, as was originally suggested.

The Chair: I see consensus in the affirmative to move forward on this motion, so we will.

Members, there has been proper notice given for this motion, and you have that motion before you now. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I moved the motion that you have before you. I made a point of sending a French and English copy to all members of the committee. It deals with the question that will be debated in the days to come.

We are asking this committee to take a position. The motion is clear. It reads as follows:

That the Committee recommends that the government vote in favour of the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples at the next working session of the Human Rights Council.

That the Committee adopts these recommendations in a report to the House and that the Chair table this report in the House.

That is the substance of the motion. Given that everyone has the necessary documents, we can put the question.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First and foremost, I wish to thank the member for having sent us the documents. The notice for the tabling of documents is 48 hours, but we only have 24 hours to examine it. I believe that this committee does want to consider this matter and that the member's motion is of significant and of interest to this Committee.

I suggest that we take whatever time is necessary to properly study this motion because it will have an impact. It is also incumbent upon this committee to put forward structured and intelligent recommendations to the government. I had the chance to briefly go over the documents sent to us, but 24 hours is not enough time to do an exhaustive study. It is important that the committee delves seriously into the matter.

We could have more information on the motion and on the United Nations resolution. We could also invite a representative from the Canadian delegation at the UN to present Canada's position. He could explain how this resolution came about as well as the long and short of it.

I agree to studying the motion proposed by the committee member, and I suggest that in order to carry out a valid study and reach an enlightened decision, we should invite a representative from the Canada delegation.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: With all due respect to my colleague, I am a bit surprised by the government's reaction. It has been in possession of the documents necessary for an understanding of this file, not just since last week or a couple of days ago, but since February 2006. The government has been developing this statement for the last 10 years. In our opinion, this motion in no way undermines the rights of Canadian parliamentarians. Since last December or January, presentations have been made by the Canadian government to the UN. I do not understand why the government is saying that it still wants more time.

I will not voice my suspicions, but I believe that we must show our support for this file to move ahead so that there finally be a Charter of Rights of Aboriginal Peoples or a UN declaration on the rights of Aboriginal Peoples. The sooner the better.

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief.

I think it is important that we move ahead with this quickly and definitively. We know that this is coming to a vote at the United Nations in a very short period of time, I think within about 10 days. This document is a draft document. It's a culmination of many years of work by many people, by government, by representatives of indigenous peoples throughout this land, and it's a very important document. Canada has had a leadership role in developing this document, in drafting this document, and I believe it is important that we maintain the leadership role as a champion of human rights throughout the world and that we move forward and pass Mr. Lemay's motion.

I commend Mr. Lemay for bringing it forward, and I believe we should move ahead with it quickly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaney, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Neville's concern is an interesting one. The resolution refers to the next working session of the Human Rights Council. I believe that it is scheduled to start in 10 days. We may perhaps be meeting before then.

I am neither for or against voting on the motion. However, I am saying that even if the decision was handed down last February, it is important that, as a committee, we must reach an enlightened decision, or that at least we should study the issue. We must hear from the representative. Within 10 days, we will have the opportunity to hear from the head of the Canadian delegation, who I am told is Mr. Wayne Lord. He may have interesting things to tell us, which may help us better understand the depth of our decision. The further we study this issue, the more our decision will be based on valid arguments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too want to echo the approach of my colleagues on this side of the table to this. I think a significant amount of work has been done already on this document. In terms of the language that we hear out in this country about closing the poverty gap and other issues that are confronting first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, it would seem critical that Canada make a clear statement about its commitment. This document, as people pointed out, is a draft, but it's a recognition, and an important recognition, around human rights and indigenous issues, and I think it would be important that we.... What Mr. Lemay's motion is calling for is for us to recommend that this go before the House, and I see that this will be an opportunity for us to make a clear statement in that regard.

Could I just ask one procedural question? This motion says "that the Chair table this report in the House". Is there a timeframe attached to this? So if this motion passes as it stands, is there a timeframe by which it has to go to the House?

The Chair: Once the report is prepared for the House, then it's up to me to table that in the House, and then the minister has 60 days to respond to it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: There's no timeframe from this committee?

The Chair: No.

• (1550)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Then I would propose an amendment to Monsieur Lemay's motion that says, after the words, "that the Chair table this report in the House", the word "immediately". I would add the word "immediately".

The Chair: Mr. Préfontaine has to put it together, and "immediately" is vague. You should maybe just say before "the first opportunity" rather than immediately.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I don't know about "the first opportunity". Could I ask how long it would take to prepare the document?

The Chair: About the same as immediately.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, so within ten days.

The Chair: That's fine.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, within ten days.

The Chair: That's okay. Thank you.

Do we want it in the motion, or is it just going to be understood by the committee?

I'm going to close debate on this, because each side has had an opportunity to speak to it and we have witnesses here who need to move forward. I'm going to call for the question.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

Could we move on to the orders of the day? We have a briefing on education of aboriginal people. Could I ask our witnesses to come forward and sit before the committee, please?

From the Assembly of First Nations, we have with us Mr. Fontaine, the national chief; Richard Jock, the chief executive officer; Bob Watts, chief of staff in the office of the national chief; and Angus Toulouse, Ontario regional chief.

Welcome to the committee, and thank you for your attendance.

I want to thank you very much for your patience. We had one issue we wanted to deal with before we proceeded with witnesses. As chair, I will assure you that we'll give you ample time to give us your presentation and we'll have ample time for questions. Thank you again for your patience.

I would like to turn it over to you, Chief Fontaine, to begin your presentation.

Chief Phil Fontaine (National Chief, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Assembly of First Nations, I thank you, the chair, and the members of this committee for the invitation to be here this afternoon.

As you all know, the Assembly of First Nations is the national first nations organization, representing over 630 first nation governments and communities. I might add that we're a non-partisan political organization. We represent the views of first nations, and that is our responsibility. Our mandate makes it very clear that we are and must remain non-partisan. Our leadership is democratically elected, taking their instructions from the chiefs in assembly. First nations governments represent all first nations people: the 62% who live on reserve and the remainder who live in other rural and urban areas. This goes against the popular misconception that three-quarters of our people live in urban centres. That's simply not true. The vast majority of our people reside on reserve, and a lesser number reside in urban communities.

As I prepared for this presentation, I reflected on the breadth of the issues that I could cover and on the challenge this committee must face in setting priorities. I would like to begin by clarifying a few matters, following the Honourable Jim Prentice's presentation here last week, so that we can move on to the important work ahead of us.

Mr. Prentice spoke of some plans to address his government's priorities. He may have left you with the impression that first nations agree with these priorities and have been consulted regarding them. So I want to clarify this particular matter. While the minister and I have had ongoing and, I must say, productive discussions and we both share concerns on a number of matters, such as education, housing, and issues pertaining to women, children, and families—particularly as it relates to violence against women and children—we are at the present not involved in any working groups. So we would respectfully disagree with the suggestion that we've been consulted on these plans. We've talked about them, yes, but there has been no understanding reached on how we would address these very important issues. So I want to make it clear that we haven't come to the point where we actually support the approach and the priorities that are part of the plan.

I also understand that there has been considerable discussion regarding the outcomes achieved at the first ministers meeting in British Columbia last November. Some people have challenged the understanding reached, as to whether it should be called an accord or whether there was an agreement at all. I want to be absolutely clear before the committee that there was an agreement involving ten premiers, three territorial leaders, the national aboriginal leaders, and the Prime Minister of Canada. It was the culmination of 18 months of hard work. We all referred to it as an agreement, or an accord, most recently at Gimli just a week ago.

The fact is that this government, which values accountability and transparency, must acknowledge that the process in British Columbia last November was a fully public and transparent process. So we truly believe that an agreement was reached with the country, and not with one political party. It engaged 14 jurisdictions, and 14 jurisdictions endorsed our plan, and it was our plan that was the subject of discussion in British Columbia.

● (1555)

The government is certainly entitled to have its own views and priorities. We don't question that; we respect that fact. However, we should not allow the hard work of all concerned, all the good intentions, and the hope born in that agreement to be trivialized in any way.

This agreement was about the future well-being of Canada, and our shared future must not be held hostage to partisan politics. I believe Premier Campbell of British Columbia put it well when he stated the honour of the Crown is at stake.

My concern continues to be how we take what was agreed to at the first ministers meeting and move forward with it, based on the shared objectives and targets the current Minister of Indian Affairs says he supports. This means we need to understand one another in our roles as governments.

In discussions about Bill C-2, the minister indicated he believed first nations governments that have not signed a self-government agreement—and only 17 first nations have signed self-government agreements—have a different constitutional standing from all other governments. I respectfully but vigorously disagree with that position. The courts have repeatedly recognized the inherent and customary jurisdiction of first nations governments in this country that goes far beyond and pre-exists any delegation of authority through the Indian Act. This recognition is captured in section 35 of the Constitution Act.

In the practical sense, our governments have responsibilities equivalent to municipal, provincial, and federal governments. As such, the Assembly of First Nations is seeking an amendment to Bill C-2, put before the special parliamentary committee dealing with this issue, to treat first nations governments in the same way as every other government.

Having said that, we must move beyond the debates of yesterday and focus our energies on improving the quality of life of our first nations people, for our sake and for the sake of this country. The important question is, what produces results? I underline, what produces results? We can learn from the examples of three of our recent achievements: one, the final settlement on residential schools, concluded in May; two, the political accord on the recognition and implementation of first nations governments, signed in May 2005 between our organization and the Government of Canada; three, the agreement reached at our meeting with the first ministers in November 2005.

These achievements represent an important foundation for change. However, there remains an urgent need for the federal government to demonstrate to first nations its commitment to move forward in a concrete and comprehensive manner.

We have suggested a framework for addressing the new federal government's priorities within the context of existing agreements, which we call the first nations action plan. It involves four essential commitments from all governments: one, to create trust and respect in our relationships through action on the political accord on the recognition and implementation of first nations governments; two, to build a functional accountability relationship to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources; three, to remove the fiscal discrimination currently faced by first nations governments that aligns funding with government service delivery responsibilities, and to ensure first nations are fully engaged in all discussions regarding fiscal imbalance, including at the Council of the Federation and future first nations-first ministers meetings; and four, to close the gap in quality of life between first nations and non-aboriginal Canadians.

Within this framework we identified an action plan and priority issues. We also identified the issues that may put the agenda at risk if they are not addressed. In addition, we acknowledge the need to move forward on economic, environmental, and social development issues that have been flagged at the FMM, to the next round of first ministers meetings supposed to take place in two to three years from the date of the first ministers meeting in November.

● (1600)

The first nations action plan is comprehensive and is definitive in its approach. As I stated earlier, this plan requires the active support of the Government of Canada to succeed.

Why this plan and why now? You all know that all governments came together on a process that resolved to close the quality of life gap between our people and non-aboriginal Canadians within 10 years. You all heard the Auditor General of Canada speak of more than 35 years of promise for change and of failure to achieve results. We are deeply concerned that the current government is responding to criticisms about its lack of action on our issues by, in turn, pointing the finger at the previous government and its supposed lack of action.

We should not be debating who is more inactive; we should be taking real action. Real leadership means turning inertia into energy for the betterment of all of Canada. The Auditor General identified seven critical success factors: sustained management attention, coordination of government programs, meaningful consultation with first nations, developing capacity within first nations, developing first nations institutions, developing an appropriate legislative base for programs, and resolving the conflicting roles of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Our plan speaks to these issues. From every perspective this is the right plan, and the time for it is well past due. I find it difficult to speak of the urgency we face without sounding as though I'm being overly dramatic. I want you to understand when I say action must happen now.

I'm speaking of the cost of lost opportunity if the contribution first nations youth could make to answer Canada's demographic challenges is not recognized.

I am speaking of the cost of lost revenue when conflict prevails over cooperation with regard to resource development, especially on megaprojects such as oil and gas pipelines and hydro generation. We understand there are at least seven key resource projects anticipated to be the drivers of the Canadian economy over the next period, and first nations interests figure prominently in each one of these. It is in all of our interests to ensure that cooperative arrangements that build partnership for mutual benefit are in place.

I'm speaking of the cost of doing nothing, in terms of increased social programming and direct payments to react to, rather than prevent, problems.

I am speaking of the need for each of you to hear the facts rather than assumptions about first nations and to act for the good of first nations people in all of Canada.

My recommendations to you today are about how to test what you hear from any witness, including us in our presentation. As parliamentarians....

By the way, this is not a lecture, but I thought I should point this out to you.

● (1605)

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. We need a lecture once in a while.

Chief Phil Fontaine: As parliamentarians, you have an important duty to uphold the honour of the Crown. You must be satisfied that government proposals and policies are consistent with section 35 of the Constitution Act.

I would also ask you to consider whether what you hear meets the Auditor General's seven critical success factors. And when people tell you that first nations people have been consulted, I want you to apply a test of five criteria that the Assembly of First Nations has developed for successful policy development: is there first nations leadership, national dialogue, independent first nations expertise, government mandate for change, and a joint national policy process?

When people talk about the credibility of first nations information, I would ask you to compare the work I have referenced today—the key elements of the first nations action plan, the process laid out in the political accord on the recognition and implementation of first nation governments, the proposal in our accountability for results initiative, and the five tests in our backgrounder on joint policy development. If these items do not stand up to these tests, then I would respectfully ask you to reject what you are hearing. On the other hand, if these tests are met, then I'm asking for your vigorous support, so that we can establish sustainable solutions to these urgent problems.

I would again like to thank the committee and its chair—you, Mr. Mayes—for this opportunity to address the issues pertaining to the first nation governments and their citizens.

Let us remember that Canadians are watching. Indeed, the world is watching us. Canada's reputation as a beacon of aboriginal and treaty rights has frankly always been built on shaky ground, and it has begun to collapse in recent years under the weight of international scrutiny by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and other international organizations.

Canada's position on the United Nations draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples is before this committee for consideration. In the past, Canada played a leadership role on this matter, and I'm talking about years, because this process has been a work in progress for about 18 years, at least. Recent signals that this government will instead align itself with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, the notorious—at least from our perspective—opponents of the declaration, are deeply troubling.

The Canadian people are champions of human rights. It is a Canadian who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration is intended to establish international norms and standards in regard to indigenous peoples and thereby effectively extend such protections to the most vulnerable populations of the world. The current version already contains much compromise on the part of all parties, including indigenous peoples. If this government chooses to change course and oppose the declaration, over 18 years of careful diplomacy will be lost, and most importantly, so will be a critical human rights instrument.

This government has said that it is concerned that rights are expressed in the declaration without context, yet right within the text there are explicit guarantees that this declaration is to be read within the domestic framework, protecting all human rights. In our view, there is nothing to fear from this declaration and much to gain. In

many ways, here at home and in the world at large, we are at a crossroads. We can continue down a path of poverty and disparity or we can change tack on a new course towards progress and prosperity, a journey we believe we can make together towards a better future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Fontaine.

We will begin our round of questions. We'll start with the Liberal Party.

Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to share my time with my colleague Mr. Merasty, who has to get away a little early.

Thank you very much, National Chief. You've certainly set out the framework and the environment in which we're currently dealing with a whole host of issues as they relate to aboriginal communities across this country.

We have, as you are well aware, been speaking frequently of the Kelowna accord, the accord signed last November in British Columbia, and the importance of it as an underpinning for all of what you have brought forward today. I wonder if you could speak to the Kelowna accord a little bit more in terms of what it does and does not mean for your communities should it not move forward.

I would also ask what your understanding of it is as it relates to the financial commitment made by the previous government. In doing that, I will table with the chair a little later the blues from the finance committee, where it was made quite clear that the sources and uses tables provisioned for the Kelowna accord, and it has been suggested that the moneys were never booked.

So I wonder if you could speak to Kelowna and what it means.

You've referenced it here. We're gathered to speak about education, and if you'd like to focus on education, that's fine. But that's where my questions are.

• (1610)

Chief Phil Fontaine: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that the single most important social justice issue facing Canada is the poverty that plagues our people. We've understood this. We've lived it, and we know what poverty does to a people. We've been determined to engage governments, all governments, in a plan that would eradicate poverty in our communities. We've worked very hard to convince 14 jurisdictions to join with us in giving life to a plan that would be designed to eradicate poverty.

We all recognize the manifestations of poverty in our country. It's the housing crisis that challenges our community—a housing crisis that's been discussed in the Auditor General's report. It's the education challenges that our people face. It's about the fact that we can't access quality health care. I mean, we can't even concern ourselves with wait times. What we worry about is making sure we have doctors, nurses, and health care practitioners in our communities, so that our nursing stations—not medical centres, not health clinics, but nursing stations—can adequately serve our people. It's about economic opportunities, and what to do about the tremendous economic activity we are witnessing and the fact that we are still plagued by a 40% to 90% unemployment rate in too many of our communities. It's about the relationship between our governments and other governments.

We were able to convince the 14 jurisdictions of the validity and legitimacy of this plan—a plan that was considered by all as reasonable, doable, and achievable. It was a plan that was designed to close the gap in the quality of life between our people and the rest of Canada.

One of the problems in this struggle—and I say “struggle” because it has been a struggle—is that our governments and our communities have faced a 2% cap on core programs and services since 1996. This 2% cap has resulted in a 14% loss in purchasing power.

Health suffers from a 3% cap. Consider what transpired in the February 23, 2005, budget, where first nations health programs suffered a cut of \$269 million while provincial and territorial health systems received a one-time injection of \$255 million. It's obvious the real need exists in our communities. I don't have to cite all the statistics about what poverty does to our people and how it's manifested in our communities.

When we went forward before governments with our plan, it was really to put to them a challenge to join with us in beginning a process to eradicate poverty in our communities, because the cost of poverty, as I've outlined in my presentation, is enormous. In 1996 it was pegged at \$7.5 billion. By 2012 it will be \$12 billion. That's an enormous burden to be shouldered not just by our people, but by the country. It makes better economic sense in our view to buy into the plan that we brought forward to the first ministers in November.

• (1615)

Here is our understanding of the resource commitments that were achieved there. We knew that the fiscal update brought forward on November 14 would not have reference to the outcomes we achieved in British Columbia, because that first ministers meeting only took place on November 23 and 24. But we understood that the money for those commitments was secured.

We've checked a number of sources, and everywhere we've been, we've been told that the money was secured. In fact, we were informed back then that the first draw on the surplus would be to address those commitments made at the first ministers meeting in British Columbia—the first draw. What we've witnessed now, with the budget being tabled, is that those commitments are not part of the proposition that is before the country.

The Chair: Chief Fontaine, I have to apologize, but I have a schedule and a speaking order I have to follow.

Chief Phil Fontaine: I was just getting carried away with my own story.

The Chair: That's okay. No problem.

Chief Phil Fontaine: I'll try to make my answers a little briefer.

The Chair: Mr. Lemay, are you going to speak, or Mr. Lévesque?

Go ahead, Mr. Lemay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Good afternoon, Chief, and good afternoon to your team. Thank you for being here.

First and foremost, I want to say that you can continue where you left off, because what you say is of great interest to me.

As a spokesperson for the Bloc Québécois, I was very surprised to see that the Kelowna Agreement was set aside. For myself, many of my colleagues, definitely all of my fellow Bloc Québécois colleagues, and I assume for many of my colleagues in the Liberal Party and the NDP, this agreement was between two governments. I have always claimed that when a government signs a document, it must respect its signature. The Prime Minister at the time happened to be Mr. Martin, who was merely the government's envoy.

Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the case. You saw the same budget I saw. As of now, what is being done? I am quite troubled. I looked at the figures tabled by the government. They repeat several times that \$400 million was set aside for on reserve communities, when we were actually expecting more than \$1.2 million... I do not know where you are headed, I do not know where we are going.

Nonetheless, I ask myself a question that I in turn want to ask you, chief, and your team. We are going to begin a study. I am happy that you are here with us today, because we have met the minister and senior departmental officials. We are beginning to get a better idea of things and to talk about education. I have always said and will always continue to say that the eradication of poverty starts with education.

Today is June 7th. It seems as though the government will not put in more money. What are you recommending we do? What can be done with what the government, to this day, has given?

• (1620)

[*English*]

Chief Phil Fontaine: Mr. Chair, of course we would like to see the full support of the House to move forward on our plan. As I pointed out to the committee, this is a reasonable plan. It's achievable; it's doable. It's about the eradication of mass poverty in our communities. It's designed to address the housing crisis, education, health, and economic opportunities.

For example, with housing, there's been an attitudinal shift that's occurred in our community. At one time, you would never hear of private ownership when we talked about the housing crisis. Today there's a willingness, and indeed a strong interest, in looking at market housing as one of the answers to deal with the housing crisis, keeping in mind that social housing is still the biggest single demand and need in our communities.

It's the same with education. We want a more effective delivery system for first nations education. We want first nations control to be given a more significant expression. And we certainly are interested in talking to provincial governments in terms of how we establish governance-related institutions that give greater effect to first nations and their responsibility to the delivery of education.

So we believe the answer rests with our plan, and we are prepared to sit down and see if we can craft an appropriate approach to ensure that we meet the objectives of this plan.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect and without counting my time, since we are expecting another group at 4:30 p.m., I will skip my turn so that we can speed things up because we do not have time for two rounds. If we are called to vote at 5:30 p.m., I would like for us to hear from the others.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Crowder, please.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you. And I will keep my question short because I would prefer to hear from the chief.

I want to thank you and your team for coming today. It's important that we hear directly from you. I also want to thank you for the clarification on the percentage on reserve, because when we heard from the department earlier this week, there was some confusion about the numbers they were giving us and the terminology.

I want to reference the Transformative Change Accord from British Columbia. I'm from British Columbia, and the people who signed this accord were: the Right Honourable Paul Martin, Honourable Gordon Campbell, Regional Chief Shawn Atleo, Grand Chief Edward John, Grand Chief Doug Kelly, Chief Dave Porter, Chief Stewart Phillip, Chief Robert Shintah, and Chief Mike Retasket.

The people who were involved with the Transformative Change Accord had a clear understanding that the November discussions were real. The people who were at that meeting then took it and developed a further accord based on what they thought was a commitment.

And I appreciated the words around the honour of the Crown.

The specific question I had for you is about consultation. Could you expand on the criteria you set out concerning consultation? I am quite concerned that the department has a different understanding of what consultation looks like, based on what we heard from them this week on education. Could you say more about what meaningful consultation would look like in order to actually have first nations involved at the table?

•(1625)

Chief Phil Fontaine: Mr. Chairman, consultation has always been a major issue. It has always been pretty difficult to fashion a process where there is meaningful consultation and, most importantly for us, where, at the end of a consultative process, whatever report results from that process and the recommendations from that report are given effect.

What we don't accept is any suggestion that if someone comes to talk to us and makes suggestions, somehow we're giving our consent to whatever plan someone else may have developed in isolation from our communities. The results of a consultative process must reflect the interests of first nations and must reflect the decisions that are taken from within our community. Imposition of government will, we all know, doesn't work. That is something of utmost importance to us.

For example, in education we're now working with the Department of Indian Affairs in a collaborative process to bring forward a report and recommendations on a new policy framework for education. That will affect funding levels for first nations education programs and services so that we can address the fact that there is 30% less spent on first nations education programs and services than governments spend for other Canadians.

In special education, for example, I learned just recently that governments spend now on the order \$38,000 per student for special needs students. Indian Affairs spends on the order of \$14,000 per student. There are huge disparities everywhere we look.

We would argue that this is a direct result of governments not engaging in meaningful consultation with our governments and our leadership. Otherwise the results would be different.

The Chair: Are you finished, Ms. Crowder?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Let me just ask this. In your view, is the current educational consultation process sufficient? Is the consultation process that is currently going on with the educational framework plan sufficient? Is it inclusive enough?

Chief Phil Fontaine: At the moment it's a process that is acceptable to us. But now we are hearing rumours that cuts will be introduced for first nations educational programs and services. If in fact that is true, then the consultative process on this issue is not acceptable. It becomes a sham exercise, and I am certain Minister Prentice would not find it acceptable either.

The Chair: Thank you.

Can we move on to the government?

Mr. Bruinooge, please.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the national chief for coming today. He's an important aboriginal elder for whom I have a great deal of respect. I'd also like to wish him well in his upcoming campaign and his re-election exploits. I wish him all the best—though perhaps we may need to provide his opponents with equal time.

I would like to ask the national chief if he would agree that the agreement referred to by Madam Crowder was in fact defined as an agreement. Would he agree that it had a signature page associated with it and was in fact an agreement?

•(1630)

Chief Phil Fontaine: Our understanding, Mr. Chairman, is pretty clear. It was a process that was before the country. The process spoke to Canadians. The commitments achieved at the first ministers meeting were presented to the country. It was an agreement that was endorsed by 14 jurisdictions and five aboriginal organizations.

It's true, as I understand, because we've been told this, that we didn't have consensus within our organization. In fact, the Quebec region took the position that this process wasn't going far enough. They agreed with the outcomes, but they wanted us to go beyond them. They wanted us to talk about land, resources, and jurisdiction, and of course they had some serious problems with dealing at the same table as the Province of Quebec.

Our understanding is that what was achieved and how it was expressed was consistent with how other such agreements have been transmitted to Canadians. For example, at the first ministers meeting on health, \$41 billion was committed. There was no signed agreement at that particular first ministers meeting. There was a communiqué issued that set out the federal government's commitments to provincial and territorial governments for health.

We've done due diligence on this, and we've come to the conclusion that this matter was dealt with as other such important matters have been dealt with, and you'll recall that we shook hands with every first minister present in that room. In our culture, shaking hands with someone is very, very important. It signifies that you have agreement or that you have a deal, and you shake hands on the agreement or the deal.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I'm not disputing that you see it as an agreement. I'm just suggesting that the terms "agreement" and "accord" have been thrown around a lot and have various definitions, some of which are legally binding, some of which are recommendations to a government. There is no question that the Government of Canada sees the objectives, the targets, and the strategies laid out at Kelowna and at the first ministers meeting as very important.

I'd like to ask you if you would say that money and investment is the only issue. I would like to ask if you think that perhaps the means by which services are delivered to the people who need it the most needs to be improved.

Chief Phil Fontaine: Mr. Chairman, I believe—and I'm sure most of the people I represent would agree—that money isn't the only issue, but it is one important element. Process is also an important consideration. Structure is also an important consideration.

By structure I mean, for example, institutional development that gives true expression to first nation governments, whether we're talking about a public institution responsible for housing or new governance structures for the delivery of first nations education to our students. All of those are important considerations.

I don't want to trivialize this, either. We may quibble about what we call it or what brand we put on this, but the fact of the matter is that we have a plan, a plan that is a direct result of 18 months of long, hard work. I recall, by the way, a very important discussion I had with Minister Prentice, when he acknowledged to me and to my chief of staff, Bob, that he recognized all the hard work that went into the 18-month process, and he wasn't prepared to just discard all that hard work, and we needed to build on it.

Our position is that we know the challenges that are before us as a country. We know, because we've worked on this, how to address those issues and how to meet the challenges, and we're prepared to

sit down and figure this out so that, in fact, we can give full effect to the plan.

● (1635)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Chair, I know we have another witness. I don't mean to extend this any longer, but at the same time I want to thank the national chief for coming today. It's very much appreciated.

The Chair: As the chair, I'll do that on behalf of the committee.

We do have another witness on the orders of the day, Chief Fontaine, and since everybody has had an opportunity, we thank you very much for your attendance.

I think you should know that this committee did table a support of the Kelowna accord. I did that on behalf of the committee and it was put forward to the House, and the Minister is aware of that. I think the only reason some did not support the motion was not necessarily on the spirit of the accord but because of some of the mechanics with which we had challenges. The chair was feeling that issue a little bit—where the figures came from and whether it's enough to address the issues of priorities set in the accord.

In this committee we did bring forward our priorities. It was interesting because the priorities set forward by this committee were identical to those that were set out in the accord. So I think I can freely say that we are working with you and with the objectives of the accord.

Thank you very much for your attendance.

Chief Phil Fontaine: Perhaps I may be permitted to have the final word on this. We're encouraged by your closing comments that there is in fact a willingness, a goodwill on the part of this committee to support the accord; that you agree with the plan; and that you see it in the same way as we do—that it's a reasonable plan and the best opportunity we have right now to fix something that's broken. We desperately need to deal with the terrible situation that continues to exist in far too many first nation communities. I accept the fact that it's not just about money, that there are other considerations, but money is an important consideration and \$5 billion is not a bad start.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your attendance.

We will break for two minutes.

● (1635)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1640)

The Chair: Committee, could we please come together.

The next witnesses are the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami of Canada, and we have with us Richard Paton, director of the socio-economic development department. Welcome, Mr. Paton.

● (1645)

Mr. Richard Paton (Director, Socio-Economic Development, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It certainly gives me great pleasure to appear before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development today. I do have with me English copies of the presentation I'm going to speak to today. Unfortunately, I did not bring with me translated versions into French, nor did I bring with me translated versions in Inuktitut.

The Chair: It's the pleasure of the committee.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Chair, we do have a policy around two official languages, and I think, with respect, perhaps we could leave them with the clerk for translation.

The Chair: It is the procedure of the committee that we need to have any documents that are tabled by witnesses in both official languages and so we cannot receive those documents unless they are, but I would ask the committee, as far as the document is concerned, do we want to have the oral presentation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, and I'll instruct the clerk to please translate this and distribute the documents to the committee. Thank you.

Mr. Richard Paton: Thank you.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK, has represented the interests of over 53,000 Inuit of Canada at the national level since its incorporation in 1972. ITK is embodied by four regional Inuit organizations: the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Makivik Corporation, and the Labrador Inuit Association, which is now the Nunatsiavut government. These organizations represent all Inuit regions identified under land claim agreements, and Inuit land claim agreement areas cover over 40% of Canada's land mass and marine areas, and 100% of the Arctic archipelago.

ITK continues to be active in a number of policy areas to ensure that Inuit rights and interests are both protected and promoted. Priority policy areas are identified through initiatives or concerns originating from the community, regional, or national level, or in response to specific government actions. ITK keeps apprised of concerns at the community and regional levels through its board of directors, as well as through more direct consultations with regional and community-based organizations.

Ensuring that the two-way flow of communication is both open and smooth is a priority for the organization and a key means by which it can respond to the needs and aspirations of Inuit across Canada. Certainly there are a number of broader priorities for Inuit that we would like to present to the committee at some point. However, we are here with the understanding that the topic for discussion and interest to the committee at this time is education.

Thomas Berger summed it up nicely in his report to the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, when he said:

So it all leads back to the schools, to education, for it is Inuit high school graduates and Inuit graduates of university and other post-secondary programs who will enter the public service. There will have to be major changes in the education system in order to vastly increase the number of Inuit high school graduates; in my view a new approach is required, a comprehensive program of bilingual education

Seventy-five per cent of Inuit in Nunavut are either failing high school or dropping out altogether, and on average in the four regions it's about 70%. Mr. Berger described the current situation in Nunavut as nothing less than a crisis, and he is right. We can't sustain a modern, productive Inuit society that contributes to Canada as a whole in this situation.

While Mr. Berger's report deals primarily with the Nunavut land claims agreement, the context itself is transferrable to all Inuit in Canada. Education is a major area of focus within the Inuit land claims settlement regions. There are many reasons why Inuit do not finish elementary school or high school. Language can be one of the barriers for children when they enter into the school system, as a lot of the children are taught in Inuktitut at home. This can cause confusion for the child and frustration for the teacher.

Inuit children under the age of 14 make up 38.7% of our population. It is clear to see that we have a very young population, and the need for them to complete elementary and high school, as well as carry through to post-secondary education, is a key role in the growth of Inuit communities.

In 2001, the percentage of Inuit aged 25 to 44 who did not complete high school was 43%, compared to 15% of all Canadians of the same age. The percentage of Inuit adults overall who have not completed high school studies is 57.7%, compared to 31.3% of all Canadian adults.

A barrier to youth not completing high school is the need for them to support their families and to work. Approximately 23.3% of Inuit adults have completed post-secondary education compared to 43.8% of Canadian adults, which is almost double the Inuit level. When students enter into post-secondary education, a lot of them have to travel to bigger communities or cities. The culture shock alone and homesickness are often unbearable, so students return home.

While there are several other barriers to education, the key to moving forward is a solid action plan.

• (1650)

One of fundamental principles in Canada is respect for the Constitution and democratic institutions, processes, and conventions. As Canadians have been reminded by both their politicians and their courts, the honour of the Crown is at stake in all dealings between governments and aboriginal people. There can be no room in contemporary history for sharp practice.

Before, during, and after the most recent first ministers meeting in Kelowna, all the senior governments in Canada and the national aboriginal organizations gave their word to undertake a set of initiatives that had a realistic chance to begin to deal with the crippling gaps in housing, health, and education that Inuit and other aboriginal peoples live with. In my view, and as stated by our president recently in Gimli at the western premiers meeting, acting honourably means at a minimum keeping your word.

The word that was pledged at the first ministers meeting on the federal side was not the word of a particular individual or political party; it was the word of the Prime Minister of Canada, the highest-level servant of the Crown and the people and an important custodian of the honour of the Crown and, by extension, the honour of the people of Canada. We cannot run federalism, indeed we cannot run Canada, on the basis that high-level multi-governmental commitments to tackle fundamental societal ills that are the product of mature deliberation can be summarily discarded because one of the signatories doesn't find it expedient on partisan grounds.

The last first ministers meeting in Kelowna provided a solid 10-year action plan. While we're not saying it was a perfect plan—certainly one never is—it at least was a plan, which is something the current government doesn't apparently have. We have not been privy to a replacement plan or been invited to develop one in partnership with the federal government, and neither have the territories or other aboriginal organizations who signed the Kelowna agreement in good faith along with us.

Included in Kelowna were key commitments on education. The document entitled *Building Inuit Nunaat: The Inuit Action Plan* is our proposed action plan. It stems from more than 18 months of cooperation and effort on the part of Inuit organizations involved in developing and signing the partnership accord on May 31, 2005, and the follow-up to the partnership accord in the development of the plan. The honour of the Crown was pledged in our partnership accord, just as it was at Kelowna. *Building Inuit Nunaat* covers a wide range of issues in relation to Inuit at the international, national, and regional levels. These include education, housing, health, socio-economic, environmental, and human resources.

The education part of the first Inuit action plan must address strengthening the collaboration of efforts by governments, including the governments of the provinces and territories, and by national and regional Inuit organizations; undertaking research on relevant issues pertaining to education to improve and enhance training for Inuit teachers, curriculum developers, and administrators; and increasing educational attainment levels by Inuit through Inuit-specific curriculum, while preserving and enhancing Inuktitut language and cultural programs.

At Kelowna, commitments were made to us on capacity-building funding for teachers, administrators, and curriculum developers, as well as the development of a resource and research centre. Inuit strongly believe that commitment on the part of the Crown to deal with these issues was a step in the right direction. The next step is for the federal government to respect and act on that commitment to allow noticeable improvements to begin.

In closing, I would like to ask the committee to consider the following. First, I would ask the committee to commit to inviting Mr. Thomas Berger to present in-depth his recent report on the crisis surrounding the Nunavut project.

Second, ITK is pleased to support the committee's Standing Order 108(2), which recommends the implementation of the Kelowna agreement, and we look forward to receiving a favourable response to that order.

Finally, I invite the committee to adopt a resolution for the federal government to appoint a senior representative from outside the public service to finalize an Inuit action plan under the partnership accord by December 31 of this year. I would also suggest that resolution have the official report back to this committee shortly after that date to measure progress and results.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering the questions of the committee.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paton.

We'll start off with the Liberal Party.

Madam Karetak-Lindell.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Thank you.

I think we all agree that the way we have been handling education for the last 60-odd years has not worked for us as a people. We have success stories today that are slowly but surely bringing educated people among us.

I would like to thank Nunavut Sivuniksavut for being here, because they are certainly one of the projects and programs I talk about many times when I want to show people an example of what works when people are involved in making program criteria and have total involvement in a project.

I agree that we really need to make sure the Berger report does not sit on the shelf gathering dust and that the government needs to respond to that report.

Can you give us an idea of what initiatives we need to see—and I know you gave recommendations, but maybe for the sake of some members who are new here—in order to bring those recommendations into being?

We have Nunavut Arctic College in Nunavut, and we have other institutions; in northern Quebec we have their regional board of education. We do have success stories, but I think the key for those success stories is the people who are involved in the creation of the institutions and programs. It's more than just money; it's the involvement of the people.

I always say we have to remind people we had ways of governing and ways of educating our people before someone else came in and decided we needed a new system. What do we need to do to get that back? We have certainly acknowledged that we need to do things differently, and there are different ways of educating people. Sometimes they don't fall in with the plans of the bureaucracy, or whoever is making policies.

How do we get past that? What do we need?

● (1700)

Mr. Richard Paton: Over the last couple of years ITK has been heavily involved in a number of initiatives and in partnership with the federal government. Leading up to the first ministers meeting was the series of aboriginal round tables, and in that regard there were certainly discussions around lifelong learning. The focus in that series of round table initiatives was on K to 12.

Our recommendations stemming from that round table process essentially led us to commit to and push for the exploration of a national Inuit-specific education and resource centre. I think that is something that is clearly needed. There are best practices out there. There are certainly specific approaches to dealing with education in the north and in the Inuit regions.

The commitment over the next 12 to 18 months, if it were provided, to determine how we can move forward on the Inuit education resource centre is one that could bring together the specific initiatives we're looking at.

I think it can be done in collaboration with all of the Inuit regions—not just ITK, but those Inuit regions that we represent as well—because they bring forward, as you described, the success stories and the initiatives that are working in the regions. But without being able to bring them together to clearly identify what's working in each of the regions.... Incorporating them into that research centre is something that I think is needed.

The Chair: If you don't mind, committee, I'm going to restrict it to five minutes rather than seven minutes so that everybody has a chance before we leave.

We'll move on to the Bloc, to Mr. Lévesque. Be concise, please.
[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Paton. I represent the region of Nunavik, which differs slightly from Nunavut, in terms of the agreements signed with the province of Quebec.

On May 25, I was in Salluit and noticed that education there is different from that of allochthons. In fact, students who live in cities are able to get a good night's sleep, which is not the case in Salluit, Nunavik. When I was in Salluit on May 25, some 7 to 10-year-old children were still out in the streets at 4 o'clock in the morning because their parents were fighting at home, in housing units that are too small. I am sure that the lack of housing has a huge negative impact on students' ability to concentrate. I believe that Nunavut has the same problem.

As regards consultations, and since this committee is undertaking a study on education, do you have any recommendations on specific areas of research that this committee can look into? Are there any specific topics that have not been sufficiently researched, or on which we have neglected to get your vision? I would like to know your opinion on this subject.

[English]

Mr. Richard Paton: Perhaps one of the areas in terms of research is in relation to the preservation and protection of the Inuit language. There are various dialects as you move from region to region. In general, you have Inuktitut overall, but in the western Arctic, you have Inuinnaqtun. So there are different dialects. I think one of the areas of recommendation that you could look into is in developing Inuit-specific curriculum.

I think more research would need to be done in relation to the protection of the Inuit language itself and to identify whether or not a common language, a unified language, is something that would help in relation to the development of curriculum, or whether or not languages specific to each region need to be protected for that

particular region, rather than identifying a unified language. More research could be done overall in that area in terms of moving forward on the protection, preservation, and promotion of the Inuktitut language.

● (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I want to make sure that I am clear. Research has been carried out on specific aspects of First Nations education. Beyond the strict and basic needs of a specific culture, were you consulted during the studies that have been conducted to this date, in an effort to understand the education model that would be most beneficial to Inuit communities? I am referring to communities outside of Quebec, because in Quebec, there were agreements with the Government of Quebec on these methods. The only thing missing is space, and not methodologies, which Inuit school boards seem to be satisfied with.

Were you directly consulted by the Canadian government on these methods?

[English]

Mr. Richard Paton: Part of that consultation would have led up to the first ministers meeting through the round table process, but those were very short consultations. When you look at the round table process, you're talking about a series of meetings that happened over the course of three or four days and invited numerous participants in relation to the round table process, but not Inuit-specific. I think that's what's needed, a series of consultations with Inuit on Inuit-specific issues in relation to education.

When we see national conferences or national consultation taking place, we see issues that are relevant to aboriginal Canadians as a whole, but not in relation to Inuit specifically. I think that's what's needed, to be able to further identify Inuit-specific issues and be able to consult with Inuit specifically on how to best move forward. I don't think that has been done to date.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you for coming before the committee today. I appreciated your remarks about the Kelowna accord.

I had spoken earlier about the Transformative Change Accord that was signed in British Columbia between the Government of British Columbia, the Government of Canada, and the leadership council representing the first nations of B.C. Just for clarification, there is a slight paragraph in there that I want to read, because I think it speaks to the understanding that people had about this event that happened in Kelowna.

It says:

At the First Ministers' Meeting on Aboriginal issues on November 24th/25th, 2005, First Ministers and Aboriginal Leaders committed to strengthening relationships on a government-to-government basis, and on focussing efforts to close the gap in the areas of education, health, housing and economic opportunities.

This accord respects the agreement reached on November 25th and sets out how the parties intend to implement it in British Columbia.

I think this is an important document simply because it reaffirms the fact that all parties in Kelowna felt that they had reached an agreement that people were then taking out and acting on—in British Columbia, for example.

That's more of a comment, but I wonder if you could specifically talk about consultation. We hear much about meaningful consultation. Specifically what elements are important to you in a meaningful consultation process? What needs to be there?

Mr. Richard Paton: In relation to ITK, we do provide consultation from a national level, but in order to give meaning to consultation, you need to do more than just work with a national organization. You need to be in touch with the regional organizations and the communities themselves to be able to identify and associate with the needs that are current to each of the regions and to each of the communities.

In all four regions, there are different components and different needs in relation to education and the barriers to education that each region is facing.

There was a comment about an 11-year-old living off the street and not being able to attain a level of education because of the fact that he or she may have been living off the street. Housing is certainly a major component and a major issue in dealing with a number of issues across the north and across each of the regions, and it ties into education. But the needs in relation to housing are different in each region, and the needs in relation to the barriers that Inuit are facing in each of the communities are also in varying stages.

So I think what's needed in respect of consultation is to be able to talk not only to us at the national level, but to consult with each of the regions and with each of the communities so that you can better identify and associate with what each of those communities is essentially undertaking and facing as barriers in relation to education.

• (1710)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you. I have just one quick question that will require a yes or no.

Concerning the final report of the Nunavut project from Thomas Berger, dated March 1, 2006, have you had any response at all from the government?

Mr. Richard Paton: No, not at our level at ITK.

The Chair: Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Paton, for coming here today. Thank you especially for addressing the issue of education, which our committee has agreed is our first priority.

I think it's unfortunate, Mr. Chair, that we took as long as we did to debate the motion and that we missed a large part of education in our discussion with previous witness.

I just want to say, Mr. Paton, we are committed on this side as well to closing the gaps in education, health, housing, and economic development, but we do feel that it's important as well that we

address structural changes that may be needed as we proceed in those areas.

I think I heard during your statement—and I may have misunderstood you—that the people of Nunavut actually did sign a document at Kelowna. I just want to clarify that.

And then, finally, to address the high failure rate and dropout rate that you highlighted in your report, certainly that's a concern for all of us. I noted that the Berger report, on page 53, talks about some of the local initiatives in at least a few communities, where there are methods being used that highlight traditional training and skills attainment.

What obstacles do you see in terms of the educational system, first of all, incorporating those; but my second concern would be, when those people come back to the school—and they enjoy coming back to school and learning those skills—will that limit them in any way in terms of broader job opportunities within Canada?

Mr. Richard Paton: I'm going to have to get you to repeat the last question, but I can address.

In terms of ITK and the region signing off on an agreement, it wasn't the Kelowna accord. What we signed off in May 2005 was the Partnership Accord. In Kelowna we came to an agreement in terms of the direction we were moving forward in. But the signatories to the Partnership Accord were done in May 2005, which led to the first ministers meeting and the discussions around the issues raised in Kelowna.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: The second question was regarding some of the methods of education. For example, it highlights jewellery making, basket weaving, kayak making, and so on, which I can understand would certainly be an appealing and important part of education. I'm certainly not downplaying that in any way.

Will there be a large enough job market for those students to use those skills? Our desire as a committee is not just to educate, but to have an outcome where people are gainfully employed and productive and able to care and provide for the needs of their families.

• (1715)

Mr. Richard Paton: In relation to perhaps not a well-known fact, Inuit in Canada are approximately 53,000 strong, but in our output in terms of art, in the export of Canadian art nationally, Inuit represent 10% of Canadian art export.

And so in relation to the question you're asking, the smaller industries or the smaller fields in arts and crafts specifically has great potential and great crossover into other fields as well.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Is there any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, the chair was going to ask a question. Would you like to—

Okay, Mr. Bruinooge for a brief moment.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Maybe I could just clarify your point in relation to the first ministers meeting. You talked about the consultation period not being long enough, only three or four days, whereas other members of ITK have talked the standard line of 18 months. I just want to see if there is a difference of opinion there.

Mr. Richard Paton: No, 18 months of work led to discussions at the first ministers meeting, but it took longer to come to an agreement in terms of the issues dealt with at Kelowna.

The 18 months I referred to was to the work done within the aboriginal community, and in my understanding, the agreements and the issues raised in Kelowna between the aboriginal organizations and the federal government were done over the course of two or three weeks. I could be wrong, but that is my understanding of the issues that were dealt with.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Okay.

The Chair: We only have another 10 minutes, so we'll keep it short.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Paton. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. I had the opportunity to be in Nunatsiavut last weekend and attend a couple of graduations, which are quite pertinent to this particular conversation. They were quite moving, and they also pointed toward some optimism in the Inuit communities.

I have a couple of things. This standard line about 18 months that my colleague refers to—that's 18 months of hard work on behalf of a lot of aboriginal people and aboriginal communities that lived through the Kelowna accord. In terms of the Conservatives always talking about whether money is enough, I would say that to have a boat move, you need some fuel. So we need some resources to make things go.

In terms of Kelowna itself, I would say education is a holistic approach, you can't just faction it out. And you've already touched on it. We have to deal with housing, socio-economic concerns; we have to deal with capacity building. All those things were in Kelowna.

I will ask a simple question from the Inuit perspective and ITK's perspective, and this goes to the heart of the honour of the Crown, because you can't have a treaty or an agreement with one government and have it thrown out in a few days, and then have the honour of the Crown upheld. That's not the way it works. There's a continuum there. There's a consistency there in terms of the honour of the Crown, and of course, that applies to treaties that go back millennia—not millennia I guess, but certainly centuries.

I want to ask, is it the opinion of ITK and Inuit that there was an agreement in Kelowna, and that \$5 billion was booked to achieve the targets and objectives set out in Kelowna?

Mr. Richard Paton: In my opinion, and certainly ITK's opinion, there was a 10-year plan agreed to in Kelowna that would move forward on all of the issues you just spoke to.

There were discussions about the funding that would be required to fulfill the commitments stemming from the agreement, but I personally could not speak to what that amount was associated with.

There was a 10-year action plan agreed to in Kelowna, which ITK fully supported, that recognized the Inuit concerns and the Inuit-related activities around housing, education, and socio-economic and environmental issues. So I do agree that, yes, we did have a solid 10-year plan, which we felt was a plan and something we could move forward on.

• (1720)

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

The Chair: We still have a few minutes.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: I wanted to provide a clarification that might help with Mr. Albrecht's question.

When I was with Nunavut Arctic College, we found that doing just the literacy and basic adult education was very standard. It made it hard for people to stay in the program if they were just going to school for upgrading, and reading and writing. But if you incorporated a theme with it, such as jewellery making—which is what I wear all the time, made by students—the retention of the students was a lot higher because they were doing something they enjoyed.

Inuit are very artistic people, and they did that along with the reading, writing, and upgrading. It had a much higher graduation and success rate.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I certainly wasn't implying that it wasn't worthwhile. But the motivation for my question is that I have a son who is an artist, and I know he doesn't make a living by his art. That was my bigger concern: that it was adequate to actually providing a job by which they could make a decent living.

A voice: But he's not Inuit.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: No, I know. That's why I was asking. Is it different in that context?

The Chair: From the government side, is there someone to ask a question?

The chair will ask a question, if that's all right.

Really, the mechanics of the agreement are something that concerned me when I read the Kelowna accord. I understand there weren't any estimates completed, or a plan. You said in your presentation that there needs to be a plan developed.

I have a hard time—because I'm a business person—in that you always develop a plan and then put in the dollars. I understand that the intent was to put a general amount in and work down from that. That's a bit against the way I operate personally, and so that was my struggle. As far as the points and the issues raised in the accord are concerned, I think we all agree that they were the priorities of the people who were part of that agreement, and I think we respect that.

I lived in the north for a number of years, actually in the Yukon, which is a little farther west—the California of the north, I guess—but it was interesting because they made some great steps in education. They focused on what I would call pathways to employment for those people. They looked at the region to see what the opportunities were, then sent those pathways in a direction, so students wouldn't have to leave the northern region to go to be an engineer in Calgary, or whatever that might be.

Is there a desire for most students to stay in the north and be close to the community? If so, do you see educational opportunities presented in a way that would ensure they could do that?

Mr. Richard Paton: I think most students would certainly agree with me, and certainly most Canadians would agree, that living at home or living close to home is something that everyone wants. For the Inuit, that is certainly something that has been a barrier to education, because of the fact that at the higher level of learning, post-secondary and beyond, that level of education is away from home.

In terms of what's needed in relation to that, I think there are two things. The most important thing is the development of curriculum in the Inuktitut language. As a youth, when you're growing up, you're taught in Inuktitut by your parents and you understand Inuktitut first and foremost; therefore, being able to move into an education system or an institution that provides the level of education required in your own language is something that's important.

Tied into that is the ability and the capacity to provide that level of service. So when you look to the north and at identifying how to move forward, the requirement for educators, for teachers, for instructors, is just as important, in relation to providing a level of service in Inuktitut. When you look at some of the statistics that are coming out, close to half of the teachers we have today will be retiring in the next five to ten years, and so it is just as important to initiate the process of ensuring that the educators are there and the system is set up to provide the educators the opportunity to stay in the system.

The system we have right now is such that if I went through the education system and I got the level of learning they get, I have every other opportunity to work in other fields of opportunity. So when we address the issue of education and the issue of providing adequate numbers of educators in the education system, we need to take a broad focus and look at how we address the issue of ensuring that the capacity of the Inuit is such that they have the opportunity to work in all fields of opportunity, and not just the education system.

I think when you look at Mr. Berger's report, he touched on that issue as well.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee, I want to assure you that this committee is focused on an action plan and on making sure that we see things more forward in education. I am sure we will be working with you and the department in the future.

Thank you very much for your presentation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Richard Paton: I would like to say one thing in closing, because I didn't touch on it. It is in relation to what we're talking about here today, and that is the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. I know it was discussed briefly here at the table.

The Chair: It was adopted by the committee and will be forwarded to the House.

Mr. Richard Paton: It recognizes the over 18 years of work that has gone into it, and we do fully support that draft declaration.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Committee, just before we run, I want to say that we need to have a subcommittee meeting to look at education and to try to focus a little bit on where we want to go with that, and also to look at some of the opportunities for witnesses in the future. Would it be agreeable to members to have a subcommittee to discuss that? We just can't seem to get enough time at our regular meetings.

So I would ask the clerk if he would organize that for us.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chairman, I suggest that we use the same approach we did when we were highlighting our priorities, and each submit a number of names to the subcommittee, which should look at those, come back, and then we would look at them. That really worked well when we were looking at our objectives or priorities.

The Chair: I think that would be acceptable to the chair. So if you could get your priorities on witnesses to Mr. Préfontaine, he could forward those to the subcommittee and we'll review those.

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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