



Government of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada

Canada

## OVERVIEW OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA

The Indigenous peoples of Canada are collectively called Aboriginal peoples. There are currently over 1.1 million Aboriginal people in Canada, including First Nation communities, mixed-ancestry Métis and Inuit people of the north.

Cooperation marked the period of early contact between Aboriginal peoples and European settlers, which began some 400 years ago. As the number of settlers grew, European culture and values dominated. The effects of past assimilative policies and programs still persist.

The approach of the Government of Canada to Indigenous issues has evolved as it recognizes and tries to rectify past mistakes. Today, the government bases its policies on the principles of respect, reconciliation and renewal.

The formal apology issued in June 2008 by the Prime Minister of Canada to former students of Indian residential schools is evidence of this improving relationship. By the time the last school closed in 1996, residential schools had isolated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities.

## GOVERNANCE

Between 1701 and 1923, Aboriginal peoples and the Crown signed approximately 70 treaties. In 1982, the existing rights of Aboriginal people were recognized and affirmed in the Canadian constitution. By way of policy, Canada also recognizes Aboriginal peoples' inherent right of self-government. The Government of Canada's present policy is to negotiate new treaties and agreements to give Aboriginal governments greater control of their lands and resources.

As the maps show, over 80% of Canadian territory is covered by modern or historic treaties with Aboriginal peoples

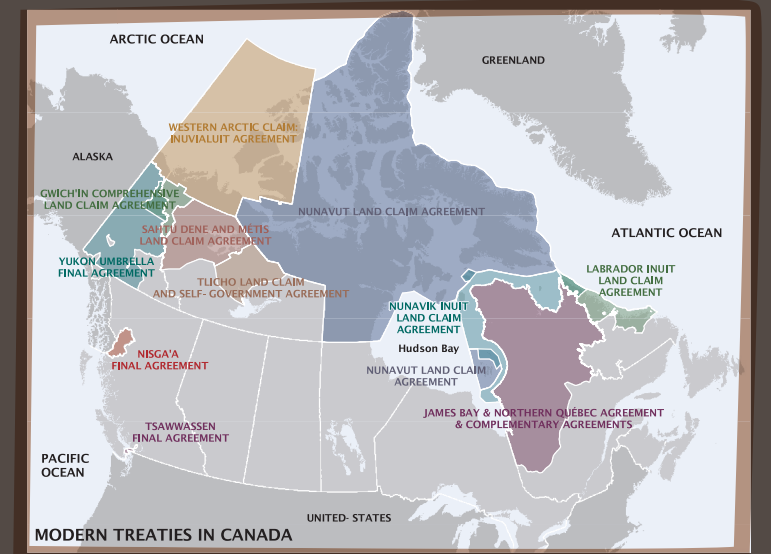
# A Government of Canada Perspective on ABORIGINAL ISSUES

*“Canada is a test case for a grand notion—the notion that dissimilar peoples can share lands, resources, power and dreams while respecting and sustaining their differences. The story of Canada is the story of many such peoples, trying and failing and trying again to live together in peace and harmony.”*

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)



Historic Treaties in Canada (1701-1923)



Modern Treaties in Canada (to 2008)

## COMMUNITIES

Today, Aboriginal peoples in Canada face a number of challenges. The Government of Canada supports their search for solutions, working with Aboriginal communities to develop priorities and providing funding for programs. Programs are often delivered in partnership with the provinces and territories, Aboriginal governments, band councils and municipalities.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### CHALLENGES

*The Aboriginal population of Canada faces many economic challenges that are often exacerbated by geographic isolation and uncertainty over land rights.*

*Among these challenges: In 2006, 13.2 percent of Aboriginal people were unemployed, compared to only 5.2 percent of non-Aboriginal people. In the same year, Aboriginal people's average income was 25 percent less than other Canadians'.*

### GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSES:

- Investing over \$400 million per year on initiatives to develop human resources, including training, private sector partnerships and youth employment programs
- Dedicating \$500 million per year to community initiatives and business-development services
- Developing and expanding a network of Aboriginal financial institutions
- Promoting partnerships between Aboriginal communities and the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other levels of government

## HEALTH

### CHALLENGES

*Aboriginal people in Canada, on average, have poorer health than other Canadians. Aboriginal people are 10 times more likely to have tuberculosis, five times more likely to have hepatitis, and have a life expectancy 6.4 years below the non-Aboriginal Canadian average.*

### GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSES:

- Devoting over \$2 billion annually to First Nations and Inuit health care
- Delivering primary health care in 200 communities
- Providing home and community care services in 600 communities, including pilot projects for pre-natal care and diabetes in remote communities

## EDUCATION

### CHALLENGES

*Approximately 34 percent of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 do not have a high school diploma, compared to 15 percent of non-Aboriginal people the same age. In the same age group, only 8 percent of Aboriginal people have a university degree, compared to 15 percent of the general population.*

### GOVERNMENT OF CANADA RESPONSES:

- Providing over \$1 billion annually for primary and secondary education for Aboriginal students
- Facilitating post-secondary education by providing additional funding for tuition, travel costs and living expenses
- Creating and supporting agreements between the federal government, Aboriginal peoples and the provincial governments to improve education
- Providing funding to preserve Aboriginal languages

## INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

More than 370 million Indigenous people live in over 70 countries around the world. Often, they are politically and socially marginalized in their home countries and seek to establish and strengthen international partnerships.

Canada engages actively on a number of international Indigenous issues. Working with Aboriginal groups at home and international partners abroad, Canada contributes to improving the situations of Indigenous peoples worldwide in a number of areas, including human rights, economic development, corporate social responsibility and conflict prevention.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

### ABORIGINAL AND CIRCUMPOLAR DIVISION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

[www.international.gc.ca/indigenous](http://www.international.gc.ca/indigenous)

### INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

[www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index-eng.asp](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/index-eng.asp)