

# *Canada's North Summit 2013: Communities, connections and communications*

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## Intro

The [Canada's North Summit](#) could not have been timelier. It became the forum to reflect on the mining and gas development poised to take off in the heart of the North, on education, housing, health care, and other persistent social issues, on climate change (which is continuously and relentlessly placing pressures on communities and their traditional ways of life), and on international discussions such as the [Arctic Energy Summit](#) and the inaugural [Arctic Circle](#). It also came as the Canadian government prioritizes our Northern Strategy, as noted in the [Speech from the Throne](#),

This commentary provides an overview of the key themes discussed at the Canada's North Summit and briefly summarizes a few of the presentations in order to provide a more in-depth look into conversations that took place. More information about the Canada's North Summit, including the agenda and list of speakers, may be found at the Conference Board of Canada website [here](#).

## Context and Key Elements

A group of more than 300 Canadian and international thought leaders, decision-makers and other influential figures immersed in Northern economic and social affairs gathered in Whitehorse from October 15 to 17, 2013. Topics covered included economic development, housing, health, education, governance, treaties, traditional knowledge, foreign direct investment and community resilience. Below are some key recurring themes that emerged throughout the [Summit](#):

- **Relationship building—there is much work that needs to be done.** The relationship between First Nations and other communities is highly strained. However, all stakeholders are part of this relationship and need to work harder at it. Bob Rae suggested that First Nations would strongly benefit from a clear plan as to how they want to move forward to ensure that their interests are met, and governments need to determine how to develop a plan with both First Nations and industry at the table. Although there are signs that partnerships between those groups are underway, there is still a long way to go.
- **The definition of responsible resource development is still under discussion.** There is no broad agreement among governments, donors, companies or academics about what the optimum national “formula” for sustainable development based on resource endowments might look like. Nor is there a universal consensus over what should be in development agreements or how to negotiate them for optimal results. For these reasons, a thoughtful and rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation needs to be formulated as development proceeds that includes learning from early experiences, and adapting based on lessons learned from comparable situations.
- **Value-added vs. “Rip it out and ship it out.”** Lasting success requires that agreements take a broader and more long-term view of the development process. They must also ensure that local and Aboriginal communities have a say in—and see real benefits from—economic growth on an ongoing basis.
- **Information (in)equality.** Information about Northern social issues is now so pervasive that it can no longer be ignored. While industry may be getting wealthier, many communities remain poor. Unless industry makes the investment to strengthen its understanding of Aboriginal culture and allows people to live in traditional ways, there is going to be very little security for communities and individuals going forward.
- **Sincerity is everything.** Stakeholders and communities need recognizable, trusted partnerships, honed over many years, to help them navigate future economic development. They are not going to take potentially painful action at the behest of an industry unless they believe in that industry’s vision of a better community—and their activities to implement that vision.
- **Transparency.** Industries should have nothing to hide, and must proactively demonstrate this fact. Corporate statements about values or culture should be matched by real, unambiguous and clear enactment of their goals.
- **Moving beyond the politics of projects.** We must reverse the trend of dependency-producing institutions to dependency-liberating institutions in order to redesign, support, and empower resilient northern communities.
- **Outside visions are not what northern communities need.** They need the self-confidence to manage and govern their own lands. Northern people are strong and capable, and their communities have assets in place to address the challenges.
- **We must invest in people as much as infrastructure.** Communities lie at the heart of the culture and economy of the North. We must ensure that northern and Aboriginal communities can thrive and are adaptable to change. Actions must be taken to ensure communities are secure, well-functioning economic contributors today and in the future.
- **Education is key.** Northern Canadians currently lag behind their southern counterparts in terms of educational attainment. Currently, there are only a handful of communities in each region where the educational attainment of the adult population exceeds the national average. Investments must be made to ensure stronger, more accountable education systems among First Nation communities.

- **Imbalance between governments, investors and communities in the negotiating process.** Negotiating very complex agreements in a way that maximizes the opportunities for success in development is not easy. It requires a clear set of objectives articulated by leadership, a wide range of technical knowledge and skills, coordination among a variety of government agencies, and the ability to pursue a consistent course over time. Different groups have varying degrees of input in this process, and some groups do not have the same capacity for input as others.

## Speaker Summaries

**Janet King (Assistant Deputy Minister, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada [AANDC]).** Janet's discussion touched on the Government of Canada's Northern Strategy as well as AANDC's four main pillars of focus: sovereignty, economic and social development, environmental protection, and governance. Her presentation also touched on the recently proposed Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHAR).

**James Malcolm Ross (Member, National Aboriginal Economic Development Board).** James discussed the need for more Aboriginal participation with major resource projects and how that could be incorporated through tax exemptions, based on local participation, and legislation that gives minorities an opportunity to bid on projects, such as the USA's Section 8. Reports published by the NAEDB, the only national, non-political organization of its kind working to promote the growth of Aboriginal business in Canada, can be found [here](#).

**Scot Nickels (Director, Inuit Qaukisarvingat, Inuit Tapiritt Kanatami).** Scot concentrated his dialogue on a project his team recently completed called Nilliajut. The project's main focus was to articulate Inuit-specific perspectives on Arctic security, patriotism and sovereignty. Scot believes projects like these lead to the generation of innovative knowledge for improved research, science, and policy-making within a Canadian, circumpolar and global context. The report can be found [here](#).

**Stephen Mooney (Director, Cold Climate Innovation, Yukon Research Centre [YRC]).** Stephen gave an overview of the YRC and highlighted a few projects and programs within the Centre. They include: [biodiversity monitoring](#), [northern climate exchange](#), and [science adventures](#).

**Justin Ferbey (CEO, Carcross Tagish Management Corporation [CTMC]).** Justin touched on how he and his team at CTMC, a self-governing First Nation, went about building a private sector economy in Carcross that is set to create a sustainable flow of job and business opportunities for the community, citizens and region. In Justin's words, "To make a business profit is commendable, but what is exceptional is to directly strengthen our communities, culture, social and economic foundations at the same time." More info regarding Justin's project can be found [here](#).

**Patrick Borbey (President, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency [CanNor]).** Patrick's lecture gave an overview of CanNor's mandate, objectives and priorities. Patrick also highlighted a few success stories within each program. According to Patrick, there are currently 44 major projects in their portfolio involving 34 separate major projects that are at the environmental assessment or pre-assessment stage worth roughly \$25 million in potential capital investment, spanning the three territories. More information regarding the projects can be found [here](#).

**James B. Wilson (Treaty Commissioner, Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba).** According to James, "the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations is highly strained and the first step in strengthening that relationship stems from understanding one another." James focused his discussion on how the Business Council of Manitoba is playing a role in this area through an education initiative called the Life Excel Program.

**Glen Hodgson (Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist, [The Conference Board of Canada](#))**. Glen shared his thoughts on the Conference Board's economic and fiscal outlook for each of the territories, including output by industry, labour market conditions, and the demographic makeup of each territory. Overall, Glen painted a positive outlook for 2014, contingent on the North filling some of the current gaps in the workforce.

**Bob Rae (Chief Negotiator, [Mattawa First Nations](#))**. Although Bob couldn't join the conference in person, he detailed his thoughts via video. According to Bob, there are two completely different interpretations of Treaties: the interpretation of First Nations and the interpretation of the Crown. Until we are able to work together in partnership with regards to these agreements, and until we start to invest in people as much as infrastructure, Bob believes it is going to be a rough ride.

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier (Environmental and Human Rights Activist and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee)**. Sheila provided a big-picture perspective of today's problems—the environment, the economy, foreign policy, global health, and sustainability—not as separate concerns but as a deeply interconnected whole. According to Sheila, in order to move forward, concerted measures based on mutual understanding and real partnerships with Aboriginal Peoples through their own representative institutions are vital in obtaining long-term solutions.

**Nils Andreassen (Executive Director, [Institute of the North](#))**. Nils's presentation concentrated on the Alaska context of resilience. According to Nils, Alaska faces many issues, including high energy and transportation costs, low unemployment rates, high levels of permafrost degradation and erosion, low levels of education, and high levels of social inequality. In order to support, empower, and redesign a resilient community, Nils believes that Alaska must use a community-based (and community-led) approach backed by best practices shared among the circumpolar north.

**Chief Alfonz Nitsiza (Chief, [Community Government of Whati](#))**. The Chief shared his practical experience in building a resilience plan in Whati; a community in the North Slave Region of the Northwest Territories, Canada. The starting point in the Whati's resilience plan was to look inward and map the community's strengths. External resources were then added as required in ways that complemented the community's strengths and goals.

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