

## **OPENING CEREMONY NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS' FORUM 2008**

**HONOURABLE ROBERT R. McLEOD**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2008**

### **Introduction**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the 2008 Northern Development Ministers' Forum. We are here to discuss our common interests, contributions and the, largely untapped, potential of the North.

It is a pleasure to see you all here today.

As northerners we share a great many things in common - geography, climate, mineral and natural resources, opportunities and challenges. Some of the challenges include lack of Northern awareness, insufficient infrastructure, difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees, and the dependence on the resource sector.

That resource sector is the wealth of the north. Diamond mines here and in Ontario and Nunavut and discoveries in Saskatchewan; the Nickel Rim South and Red Lake mine development projects in Ontario; uranium mining and exploration in Saskatchewan and exploration in Nunavut and Labrador; oil sands development in Northern Alberta; the Mackenzie Gas Project in the Northwest Territories; and, hydroelectricity projects in Québec, Manitoba and Labrador. These riches are the base upon which we can develop diversified industries so that when the wells run dry we will have a sustainable economy to support us.

Above and beyond physical commonalities we share the tenacious and adventurous spirit of the people who live here. We are on the front line of global changes. We see rising temperatures, alterations to seasons and wildlife patterns and the melting of permafrost and the Arctic ice pack with each new season.

Energy is also a concern in the north. The cost of fuel, the cost of shipping fuel adds to the cost of living and doing business in the north, not to mention cost to the environment of carbon based emissions! We are looking at developing renewable energy sources such as hydroelectricity, wind power, and other innovations.

All of these developments require skilled people to service them. Another of our priorities is training a skilled northern workforce able to take advantage of available employment opportunities. And, with all this growth, we need the infrastructure to service it.

Climate here can be a formidable adversary but nature also offers remarkable gifts. Northern wilds carry a pristine quality not found anywhere else in the world. Waterfalls, lakes, forests and their inhabitants, geological escarpments and the aurora borealis – these are all common natural wonders here.

The theme of this year's Forum is "Tourism Potential in Canada's North" and in these days of overpopulation, smog, pollution, high temperatures, traffic and noise – the quiet of a canoe on a northern lake is a hypnotic lure. We have so much to offer our visitors.

The people of the north are absolutely connected to the land, its protection and the protection of the environment. In every development made and every new initiative contemplated, the environment is of major concern. Aboriginal elders say they have always known there were riches here but they should not be gathered at the expense of the environment. This is a philosophy well before its time.

I am looking forward to the opportunity to dialoguing with each of you over the next few days both in the formal meeting as well as in the various external venues we will share. Welcome to the Spectacular Northwest Territories!

Thank you.