

Discussion Summary of the
Indigenous Trade and Development Round Table

A Case Study of the
Miskito/Meadow Lake Tribal Council
Inter-Indigenous Partnership In Nicaragua

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- Office for Liaison with International Financial Institutions - Canadian Embassy
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ATTACHMENTS

1. Inter-Indigenous Developments (MLTC)
2. Miskito/MLTC Development Initiative - Background Paper
3. Inter-Indigenous Partnerships - Background Information
4. Nicaraguan Atlantic Region Indigenous Economic Development Technical Support Needs - Discussion Paper

Opening Prayer

Chief Cheechum - MLTC

Chief Roy Cheechum of the Clearwater River First Nation, offered the opening prayer in his Native Dene language of Chipweyan.

Context

The Indigenous Trade and Development Round Table, which was held in the Padilha Vidal Conference Room at the Organization of American States (OAS) on 30 November, 1995, was co-ordinated by Apikan Indigenous Network and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. The meeting had two objectives; to follow up on the previous Round Table on Indigenous Trade and Development and continue building momentum for the concept of inter-Indigenous partnerships¹, and, to introduce the Miskito/Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) joint venture to the international community in Washington and to identify potential financial collaborators for the project.

Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened with remarks by His Excellency, Ambassador Brian Dickson, QC, Canadian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the OAS and by remarks from His Excellency Roberto Mayorga-Cortes, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States.

Ambassador Dickson - Canada

In his remarks Ambassador Dickson thanked the participants for attending the meeting and congratulated Apikan and MLTC for organising the meeting. He noted how Canada welcomed the Miskito/MLTC initiative. Ambassador Dickson explained that the project brings together several of the themes of the Miami Summit (poverty alleviation, Indigenous development, trade and investment and rural development) and urged the institutions and organisations present to give serious consideration to providing concrete support to the Miskito/MLTC project and other similar inter-Indigenous partnerships.

¹ See Attachment 3 for a discussion on inter-Indigenous partnerships and Attachments 1 & 2 for additional details on the MLTC/Miskito partnership

Ambassador Dickson noted with pleasure that this initiative fits perfectly well within the criteria and objectives of the Miami Summit.

Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes - Nicaragua

His Excellency Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes also congratulated the organisers of the meeting and expressed his pleasure with the initiative shown by the Miskito and MLTC in developing their partnership. Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes expressed how the National government of Nicaragua welcomes the Miskito/MLTC venture and urged the international and multi-lateral community to collaborate with the initiative and provide concrete support to the project. The Ambassador explained his long standing personal support for development of the Indigenous peoples on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, and noted his personal involvement, as Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United Nations during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, in facilitating a presentation to the UN by Miskito leader Brooklyn Rivera during the inaugural ceremonies on December 10, 1992. He went on to note how this project is exemplifies the *Partnership in Action* theme of the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Anne-Marie Blackman - OAS

Anne-Marie Blackman, Senior Specialist in the Unit for Promotion of Democracy at the OAS, welcomed participants to the meeting, noting the interest of her Unit in initiatives such as the Miskito/MLTC joint venture.

Introduction

Dave Elgie - ABC

Mr. David Elgie, Director of Trade for Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC) provided introductory remarks, noting his department's commitment to supporting Indigenous businesses and their role in supporting the Miskito/MLTC project. He advised the meeting how ABC has provided support and encouragement to the development of inter-Indigenous partnerships and how he, and ABC Executive Director Bob Dickson, both travelled to Nicaragua with Meadow Lake during the initial scoping mission that launched the partnership. Elgie also urged the participants at the meeting to find concrete ways of supporting the Miskito/MLTC partnership.

Wayne Dunn - Apikan

Wayne Dunn, Executive Director of Apikan Indigenous Network, who was also serving as Chairperson for the meeting, expressed his pleasure at the participation of Ambassador Dickson and Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes and thanked them and their offices for their assistance in organising the meeting. He also thanked the Unit for Promotion of Democracy and the Human Rights Centre at the OAS for their help in co-ordinating the meeting. Dunn then explained how the Round Table meeting at the OAS was a follow-up to a previous Round Table which was co-sponsored by Apikan and the United Nations Development Program and held at the Inter-American Development Bank in Oct-94. He stated that, at the previous meeting, which was attended by many of the organisations in the room, the concept of inter-Indigenous partnerships had been supported and Apikan and the UNDP were encouraged to facilitate the development of specific projects and initiatives. Dunn advised that, with financial support from Canadian agencies such as ABC and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and with strong collaboration from many groups and organisations such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and Plenty Canada, partnerships are being established.. He advised the meeting that an International Workshop on Indigenous Trade and Development, held in Winnipeg, Canada in September 1995, had recommended focusing Nicaragua to develop a success story for inter-Indigenous partnerships. Dunn noted that the partners in the Miskito/MLTC joint venture are strong and credible, they have the support of their communities and of their respective countries and they have very real business opportunities in front of them. He challenged the international community present at the meeting to find concrete ways of supporting the Miskito/MLTC initiative.

A short documentary on inter-Indigenous partnerships, produced by Vision TV was then shown.

MLTC Profile and Background

Chief Richard Gladue - MLTC

Chief Richard Gladue, Tribal Chief of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council followed with a presentation on MLTC. The Chief explained that his presentation was threefold: To provide information to potential financial collaborators on joint ventures designed for the well-being and development of Indigenous peoples; To provide information about the Meadow Lake First Nations, Cree and Dene people who reside in north-western Saskatchewan, Canada, and; To briefly describe MLTC's initiatives in resource development, programs and services to their First Nations people.

Chief Gladue explained how the fundamental orientation for MLTC's work is the reality that ***Healthy Individuals make Healthy Decisions***. The Chief described how the first act of MLTC was to take over the delivery of health services to their peoples and how their vision and goal is a

balance

of

physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual resources of the person and the community. He stressed the need for a holistic approach to development, whether it is in the communities of MLTC, or in the Miskito communities of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. Chief Gladue explained how, in MLTC's approach, healthy individuals, families and communities are at the centre of a circle that leads to activities in a number of areas such as, Cultural/Spiritual, Economic, Social, Physical, Legal/Justice and the Natural Environment.

The Chief went on to describe the struggle and successes of MLTC in supporting their peoples in their development efforts², and briefly outlined some of the successes they have had in areas such as forestry, social development and resource management.

CIDESA and Nicaragua Background

Samuel Mercado - CIDESA

Samuel Mercado, President of the Indigenous Corporation for Economic Development (CIDESA) then gave a brief history of the Miskito People of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and their efforts to connect with other peoples who have had similar experiences. He explained how CIDESA was formed to serve as a vehicle to enable the people of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua to participate fully in the development of their region. Mercado described how the Indigenous people of region had been struggling to support their development since the end of the civil war. He described how Plenty Canada and Pana Pana (a Nicaraguan Indigenous NGO), with support from agencies such as CIDA, the Inter-American Foundation and Apikan, have worked to support people and communities in their sustainable development objectives, and how this work led directly to Apikan and MLTC's involvement in Nicaragua and to the formation of CIDESA and the Miskito/MLTC partnership. Mercado stressed how CIDESA is open for business, providing that business is respectful of people and the environment.

Mercado outlined how MLTC and CIDESA have agreed to work together to develop forestry, mining and oil and gas opportunities in the region. He explained how the Miskito have been searching for partners that could work with the Miskito to take advantage of the many business opportunities in the region. Mercado went on to explain the development of the partnership with MLTC, and how he and other members of CIDESA have been impressed with the work MLTC has done with their own people, with their ability to emphasise health and environment and still operate profitable businesses, and with the enthusiastic and transparent way in which they have participated in the development of the Miskito/MLTC joint venture.

² See Attachments 1 & 2 for additional information on MLTC and the Miskito/MLTC partnership. Also, copies of MLTC's Annual Report can be obtained from the address at the end of this report.

Mercado urged the international community to find concrete ways of supporting the initiative and the development of the Indigenous people of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua.

Mercado explained that he was also the North American Ambassador for the Government of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua and spoke briefly on the technical support needs of the region if they are to take full advantage of opportunities such as the Miskito/MLTC business venture. He elaborated on the need for technical support in the areas of institutional strengthening, business and entrepreneurial training and support, environmental and resource management and in the development of post secondary educational institutions in the region³

Miskito/MLTC Joint Venture Plans

Ray Ahenakew - MLTC

Ray Ahenakew, Chief Executive Officer of MLTC, then described the history of the Miskito/MLTC joint venture and provided some additional background on MLTC's business operations in Canada. He described how MLTC's business and other activities are aimed at nation building and how their strength in business and economic development provides support to their nation building goals. Ahenakew emphasised the commitment of MLTC to the joint venture with the Miskito's, noting the considerable time and resources they had already invested in the project and the fact that the MLTC Chiefs are committed to this project for the long term. He outlined how both MLTC and CIDEsa want the project to both strengthen families, communities and local economies, and be profitable for the partners⁴.

³ See Attachment 4 for a discussion paper on Technical Support Needs of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Region

⁴ See Attachments 1 & 2 for additional information on plans for the Miskito/MLTC joint venture

Round Table Discussion

The following represents the highlights of the discussion during this phase of the meeting.

Morning Session

Rodrigo Contreras, Executive Director of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) moderated the discussion. Mr. Contreras noted that this kind of project has the potential to have a great and long-standing impact on the Indigenous Peoples not only of Latin America but of the whole world. He pointed out that the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and governments still differ in key ways, and that the recent advances on the part of the governmental sector, while laudable, are a result of indigenous pressures and activities. He then opened the floor to presentations from the various organisations represented at the table.

Peter Croal, of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), expressed his agreement with the goal of "healthy individuals, families, and communities", and said that a healthy economy is part of this circle. Mr. Croal asked what was being done *in business* to protect, respect, and promote culture, the family, and the community. He also brought up the issue of incorporating traditional knowledge into business development, and related this to the issue of intellectual property. He noted that CIDA is looking for guidelines on how to do this, in collaboration with the WCIP, so that it can pass these guidelines on to its project managers.

Rodrigo Contreras advised the meeting of his findings during a recent mission to Meadow Lake (Sept/95). He noted that both himself, and World Council of Indigenous Peoples President Conrado Jorge Valiente had been very impressed with MLTC's success in promoting and respecting culture, the family and the community, and in incorporating traditional knowledge into business development. Contreras added that the World Council of Indigenous Peoples has suggested to several organisations interested in the promotion of culture, family, community and traditional knowledge, that they take a look at the work being done by MLTC in this area.

Kate Dickson, of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) was delighted with the broad definition of "health" expressed earlier by Chief Gladue. She noted that one of the great problems of today is that health and human development have not kept up with "economic development". Ms. Dickson said that development should revolve around the key aspect of health. She referred to the PAHO conference held in Winnipeg in 1993 at the request of Indigenous Peoples. One the results of this conference was Resolution 5, which considered overall health and well-being to be a bridge to peace and human development in the Americas. Another result was a commission set up to monitor the state of indigenous health in the region.

Rodrigo Contreras followed Ms. Dickson's comments with the point that when he visited the MLTC the first stop on the agenda was the health centre where MLTC's commitment to the holistic health of its people was explained. Contreras explained how MLTC described how the theme "healthy people make healthy decisions" permeates much of MLTC's development efforts. Ray Ahenakew expressed his satisfaction at the new-found interest on the part of governmental agencies in looking at values and cultural beliefs as part of development. He explained how this holistic approach has traditionally been taken by his people and he is very pleased to see the growing interest by others. Samuel Mercado said that this shared worldview was precisely the reason the Miskitos had sought other Indigenous Peoples as business partners. Unlike a multinational corporation, he said, in this situation it is easy for the Miskitos to explain what they want to keep, and how important the wishes of the community are. Mercado explained how MLTC immediately understood the Miskito desire to ensure that development of the resources of the Atlantic region occur in a sustainable and holistic way that ensures personal, family and community health are addressed and that will provide benefits to all stakeholders, not just the developers.

Jorge Uquillas, Sociologist of the World Bank then briefly described the current World Bank projects in Nicaragua: two lending operations and one grant. The grant, said Mr. Uquillas, is for an indigenous training program which was developed with the participation of Indigenous Peoples and organisations in Nicaragua. The program is about to begin, under the Deputy Minister for Social Affairs, Brooklyn Rivera. Mr. Uquillas said the World Bank is departing from past practice, and is now urging the participation of Indigenous Peoples in devising and implementing programs that affect them. He welcomed the Miskito/MLTC initiative and congratulated the organisers of the meeting on the broad range of interests represented at the Round Table.

D'Arcy Thorpe, head of International Environmental Assessments for the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, asked if the World Bank was involved in environmental assessments, and wondered if CIDEsa could request funding for this, since they would want an environmental assessment of this proposal. Ray Ahenakew asked if CIDEsa might be able to participate in the training process described by Mr. Uquillas. Mr. Uquillas said that these questions were certainly worth following up, and that it would be necessary to contact Brooklyn Rivera in order to do this. He also made it clear that in the recent past, there had been an effort to convince World Bank task managers of the importance of Indigenous Peoples' concerns, and to learn about Indigenous Peoples. He felt this effort was necessary and worth continuing. He invited the proponents to follow up directly with World Bank staff in Nicaragua.

Afternoon Session

The first presentation of the afternoon was made by John Renshaw, of the Indigenous Peoples and Community Development Unit of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). He noted that the President of the IDB, Enrique Iglesias, had expressed the desire to co-operate with Indigenous Peoples, particularly on environmental assessments. The IDB makes "small grants", he said, which generally amount to some \$500,000. Mr. Renshaw is part of a new unit at the IDB, *Indigenous Peoples and Community Development*. He said that up until now, the IDB's focus regarding Indigenous Peoples has been mainly on the mitigation of the impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects such as hydro-electric projects. These projects usually involve issues of land title and economic development, and often involve resettlement of the Indigenous Peoples affected. Mr. Renshaw stated that the IDB is now trying to move away from this type of activity to positive investment where Indigenous Peoples are protagonists.

Mr. Renshaw made the point that, like other multilateral banks, the IDB is a lender of last resort, which means that on the one hand, its loans may have a more amenable payment schedule than those of private banks, but on the other hand, they take longer to get. The main activity of the IDB has been and remains lending to governments. Recently, some 10% of loans have been to the private sector for projects such as privatisation of services like transportation and water supply, for road concessions, and so on. Mr. Renshaw said that likely the IDB would consider a project such as the Miskito/MLTC joint venture and invited the proponents to follow up with the Bank, in both the Washington headquarters and the country office in Nicaragua.

Mr. Renshaw asked how the MLTC finances its present projects in Saskatchewan. Ray Ahenakew and Vern Bachiu, Director of Programs for MLTC, responded that it was through private lending institutions and reinvestment of wealth.

Mr. Renshaw also said it was important to see what ongoing loans were already under way in any country that the MLTC might want to invest in. He said that he was aware, for example, of at least one loan already in Nicaragua precisely for sustainable forestry. The MLTC could go to the IDB office in Managua and look at the portfolio, to see if there were any loans that had already been made that could be tapped into. Renshaw committed to reviewing existing IDB activities in Nicaragua to determine if other bank projects may be able to support the Miskito/MLTC joint venture.

Linda Borst, Vice President of Programs of the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) explained how the IAF is a small US government initiative that began 25 years ago, whose average grant size is about US\$70,000. Ms. Borst said that the IAF has supported many self-help initiatives and economic development projects, including networking and exchanges, and that IAF works to strengthen organisations. She said that the IAF works to show how support for traditional values

can benefit development. Wilbur Wright, IAF Director for Nicaragua, explained that IAF has
recently approved its

second grant to the Pana-Pana project, also with the Miskitos of Nicaragua. The original grant has been changed to a "development fund" of US\$173,000 over three years.

Mr. Wright and Ms. Borst spoke about concrete ways it might be possible for the IAF to help this project. They said that the IAF could provide in region travel funds and could support capacity development and training for CIDEsa. It could provide resources to quickly begin a feasibility study, and help provide a network of contacts, as well as opening doors with the corporate and multilateral lending institutions.

Wayne Dunn commented on how the last several years of development work with the Indigenous people in the Atlantic region of Nicaragua is a remarkable example of collaboration between various partners in supporting a bottoms up development process. He explained how Plenty Canada, with financing from CIDA, moved into the region in 1990 to provide emergency humanitarian relief to refugees and returnees following the end of the civil war. Pana Pana, a local Indigenous NGO was established and, through collaboration with and support from many partners including, Plenty Canada, Plenty Spain, IAF, CIDA, USAID, Apikan, MLTC and many others, development in the region progressed from humanitarian relief to support for income generation projects. Now, it has progressed to the point where everyone is sitting at this Round Table discussing a major international business initiative for the region, which is being promoted by the very people who needed emergency humanitarian relief just several years ago.

Armstrong Wiggins of the Indian Law Resource Centre said that it would be useful to observe the community development projects that had been undertaken in other places, and learn from the successes and mistakes of others. He mentioned as examples lumber projects in Oaxaca and Quintana Roo, Mexico, and a cacao/chocolate project in Bolivia. He noted that whatever development occurs must be done in collaboration with local people.

Caroline Ramsay-Merriman, President of the Craft Centre, made a brief presentation outlining the capacity of the Craft Centre to provide support for artisans and crafts people. She advised the Samuel Mercado that she would be pleased to meet with the Miskito people and discuss ways in which the Craft Centre may be able to collaborate with some of their income generating aspirations.

Peter Croal then asked if there are any initiatives at present to support the capacity development needs of the Nicaraguan partners. He suggested that there should be applications to CIDA, the development banks and others with mandates to support development in the region. Samuel Mercado said that Plenty Canada had indeed been working on this type of thing since 1990. Between 1990 and 1994 there had been a program of "construction rehabilitation" and institutional strengthening. Linda Borst said again, the IAF could help connect CIDEsa with other organisations fairly quickly, and is willing to look at providing direct support where possible.

Vern Bachiu and Sam Mercado both stated that capacity development and institutional strengthening are urgently needed. Bachiu pointed out that the consultation process, for example, is a daunting task, especially if there is little local logistical support. Things normally taken for granted here in North America are needed in Nicaragua--such as office space, telephones, and fax machines. These things are absolutely necessary, he said, because CIDEsa and its communities must be as comfortable with the final agreement as the Chiefs of the MLTC are.

Samuel Mercado, in a strong closing presentation, said that CIDEsa recognises that "the hard part is coming". But, he added, if action is not taken at some point, nothing will happen. We have to do it, and we need help. We have to set an example for other communities as well, he said. We must participate, we cannot just fight to protect our resources and lands, we must do something with them so they can provide our people with a sustainable future. Chief Gladue said that this is not a pipe dream--that everybody is going into this with their eyes wide open. He said everyone realises that it is and will be difficult, but that in the end, nothing is impossible, and if the will is there, it can be done. He reiterated the determination of MLTC to see this project through, commenting on the fact that considerable time and resources had already been committed and that MLTC was prepared to commit more. But, he added, we expect other development partners to be there with us to share some of the risks.

Wayne Dunn, in his final remarks, said that he thought he had heard an invitation from CIDA to make an application for institutional strengthening and capacity development, that the IAF had shown a willingness to collaborate in this project in several specific ways and that the Banks had noted some areas of potential collaboration and had invited further dialogue.

Closing Remarks & Wrap Up

Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes

His Excellency, Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes summed up the meeting. He congratulated the participants on the fruitful dialogue they had engaged in and stated how important it is that the international community provides concrete support to projects such as the Miskito/MLTC joint venture. He emphasised the importance of win-win approaches in projects such as this, noting that this project can provide benefits to the Miskito and MLTC, to Nicaragua and Canada and to the people and communities involved. He also noted the complementary strengths and capacities of the partners involved, and how they are each making a substantial contribution to the success of the project. The Ambassador stressed the importance of the project being successful so it can serve as a success model of the potential of inter-Indigenous partnerships.

Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes stressed the importance of international co-operation to assist with the challenges and barriers that will be faced by this and similar projects, rather than the proponents trying to deal with these issues in isolation.

Ambassador Mayorga-Cortes expressed his agreement with CIDEsa in the move towards a rational and sustainable development of the resources of the Atlantic region of Nicaragua in a way that benefits the people and communities in the region. The Ambassador made a strong statement of his belief and his hope that this type of development will help with the reconciliation and healing of the region. He concluded by again congratulating the organisers of the meeting and the partners in the project and strongly urged the international community to provide concrete and meaningful support to this project. He pledged his personal support and the support of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington for the continued development of this project and other positive developments on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

Closing Prayer

Samuel Mercado

Miskito leader Samuel Mercado, speaking in Miskito, offered the closing prayer for the Round Table at 3:30pm.

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