



# **Address to the People of the Northwest Territories**

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Premier  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
Northwest Territories

Inuvik, NWT  
January 9, 2003

**Check Against Delivery**

Elders, youth, guests, leaders and all people of the Northwest Territories:

May the year 2003 find you all in good health and full of optimism.

The change from one year to another always marks a new beginning, whether it is in our personal lives or in our workplace. For many of us it is a time of hope, renewed energy, and a new resolve to work together.

*“Working together”* – That’s what I want to talk to you about today.

It’s the reason for our achievements to date. It’s also our greatest challenge if we are going to continue to succeed in the years to come.

The next few years will be pivotal. The decisions of all leaders across this great territory will have profound implications for our future.

A great deal is at stake. We must negotiate control over our lands and resources. It is Northerners, not Ottawa, who must make the decisions.

We cannot afford to miss a single opportunity, to be divided for a minute, or to pursue our own agendas.

I am glad to have the opportunity to speak to all of you today from Inuvik. Inuvik is a community that knows how to work together and get the job done. No matter what your traditions and interests, the people here take risks, show courage and find strength in your differences.

Over the holidays, I thought about our three years as a new Northwest Territory.

In January 2001, I recall reporting to you that the Aboriginal Pipeline Group had signed the Memorandum of Understanding to build a pipeline down the Mackenzie valley.

I reported that BHP was in production and Diavik was under construction. DeBeers’ Snap Lake was on the drawing board, and discussions were being held with Aboriginal Leaders about their interest in the Talston River hydro development.

In January 2002, I remember reporting on the Hay River conference where the seeds were planted for the development of a Social Agenda.

I reported that Aboriginal Rights discussions were underway but overlap issues stood in the way of concluding agreements. Devolution and resource revenue sharing discussions were not formalized but we were hopeful to get a process in place soon.

Always, in my statements and reports to you, I recall saying that whatever we wanted to accomplish, we needed to build a strong partnership with Aboriginal and community leaders in order to pursue our goals and a shared vision.

It is important to look back to understand how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. Let me report to you today:

Our economy is booming and here are a few highlights:

Our Gross Domestic Product grew by 19.6% in current dollars in 2001. This was by far the highest annual growth rate in Canada.

By comparison, the Nation's overall growth rate was 1.5% and Nunavut's was 7.7%.

Not since the construction of the Norman Wells pipeline in the 1980's have we seen economic growth of this magnitude.

Our GDP, the indicator of economic growth, is over \$3 billion dollars. That is remarkable considering we only have about 41,000 residents.

Our employment rates are consistently the highest in Canada and our unemployment rate is the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest in the country.

Two diamond mines are now fully operational. A third, Snap Lake, will be up and running in 2006.

Socio-economic benefit agreements have been negotiated with BHP Billiton and Diavik and we are currently negotiating an agreement with De Beers. For the first time, anywhere in the world, De Beers has agreed to negotiate a supply of rough diamonds directly from the mine for local manufacturing.

This is significant and indicates that De Beers, a global leader in the diamond industry, is supportive of the NWT's desire to maximize benefits and opportunities from the development of northern resources.

The development of the secondary diamond industry in the NWT continues. Tiffany's, the well-known jewelry company from New York, recently announced a \$4 million-dollar diamond cutting and polishing facility in Yellowknife.

The Taltson Hydro project is becoming more of a reality as well; the Power Corporation has signed an agreement with the Akaitcho Government and the NWT Metis Nation to develop a detailed agreement on the further development of the Hydro potential on the Taltson system.

The development of the Social Agenda brought together front line workers, social activists and governments who produced a blueprint including 10 comprehensive recommendations to improve the well being of all our citizens. The GNWT has responded positively to all 10 recommendations and that plan is now being implemented.

One of those recommendations spoke to building capacity in small communities. The GNWT is responding by sponsoring community wellness demonstration projects in a number of communities.

We have worked hard providing input into the Romanow Commission and we have succeeded in making our voices heard: the deploring health conditions of Aboriginal peoples and communities across this country have been recognized and are finally a key issue for Canadian governments.

We will continue to pressure Ottawa to do its part and restore funding for health care. We are doing our part. Despite limited resources, the GNWT has recently invested an additional \$8.3 million dollars in human resources for our health and social services system.

And we as individuals and families have to do our part: Our challenge is for each of us to live better, healthier lives. We need to quit smoking, quit chewing tobacco, stop using illegal drugs, and drinking to excess. And we know that gambling takes too much money and time away from our families.

Each of us must take responsibility and decide to change and each of us must ask for and receive help and support. And together, we can do it.

As we look after ourselves better we must also look after our environment. We have led the nation in calling for a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change and supported the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

We will complete an energy strategy by the spring. A discussion paper is being prepared and will be the basis for a final round of consultations in February and March.

Employees of the GNWT benefited from the settlement of a long-standing grievance around equal pay. This settlement brought fairness to what people earn for the work they do.

Aboriginal Rights negotiations are underway in all the regions and several agreements were signed in the last year: the Salt River Treaty Land Entitlement and the South Slave Metis Interim Measures Agreement.

Long-standing boundary issues between the Dogrib, Akaitcho and the Deh Cho have been resolved. This paves the way for the finalization of the Tlicho Final Agreement in the coming year – the first combined land, resources and self-government agreement in the Northwest Territories.

And here in Inuvik, I am pleased to report that we have created a new Executive Director position to serve the Beaufort/Delta. This position will provide a focal point for the coordination of capacity building initiatives. And it will assist in building relations between newly emerging Aboriginal governments and regional structures. I intend to announce an appointment to this important position by the end of this month.

People, who call the Northwest Territories their home, come from many backgrounds and traditions. They hold strong and different beliefs and values. I think we are blessed. Instead of denying our respective identities, we share an unwavering resolve to celebrate our differences. With that resolve, we are building a society where there is a place, like our diamonds, for each of us to shine.

It is this territory, with its differing backgrounds and ability to demonstrate tolerance that succeeded in passing a *Human Rights Act* that is at the cutting edge of social legislation in this country.

It is this Territory in all its diversity that became the only place in Canada to declare National Aboriginal Day an annual statutory holiday. What a week of celebration that was! The week started with the Living History Symposium, which brought the Governor General, Tom Berger and other prominent northern and southern Canadians together to celebrate our history. And it ended with an exciting glimpse of the future with the signing of the Salt River Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement in Fort Smith. In between, we drum danced on National Aboriginal Day and celebrated the 2002 Reunion in the town of Norman Wells.

My colleagues in the 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly and I are proud of these achievements. Many resulted from the momentum and planning we did together three years ago. Others have been the result of planning, commitment and dedication by community, Aboriginal and business leaders.

We must keep it up. It takes leadership, patience, tolerance, hard work and, most of all, courage and generosity. It's never easy. We must collaborate, cooperate, listen to one another and compromise. This is what got us where we are today. This is what will take us where we want to go tomorrow.

Together, we will develop northern resources – both our human and our non-renewable resources. Together we will decide when and how this is done; and together we will benefit from this collective effort.

I believe the Northwest Territories leads the way in achievements through partnerships. Collaborations have or are being formed across the territory and people are working together to accomplish remarkable achievements.

A unique coalition of NWT business leaders, representing each region, is working with MLA's, Cabinet Ministers and Aboriginal leaders to lobby Ottawa for needed investments in infrastructure and capacity building for our people.

In Fort Providence, the Combined Council Alliance working together and with the GNWT brought us a step closer to realizing the long held dream of a bridge across the Deh Cho.

The Akaitcho, Deh Cho and the Dogrib First Nation Leaders worked hard found compromise and overcame their differences. They settled their territorial boundaries, now enabling Aboriginal rights agreements to proceed.

For 20 years, the transfer of control over lands and resources from Ottawa to the people of the Northwest Territories has seemed only a far-off concept. Devolution was talked about, but nobody really believed it was possible.

But our vision of being masters in our own lands and of being the decision-makers about matters that affect us has only grown stronger. And in the last year, Aboriginal governments, the GNWT and the federal government agreed to a Memorandum of Intent to guide devolution negotiations. At last, we are at the table. And in the true spirit of collaboration, the Aboriginal Summit and the GNWT are developing and tabling joint positions in resource revenue sharing and self-government financing.

The road ahead will not be easy but we are determined, we are together and we will settle for nothing less than a timely, fair and equitable agreement on devolution and resource revenue sharing. It is our right.

Today I have talked a great deal about working together. That's because in the next few years we face tremendous challenges and many difficult issues.

While we are determined to keep investing in our people and our territory, and remain fiscally responsible, we continue to struggle with inadequate financial resources. To achieve our vision with ever diminishing resources is an overriding and constant challenge. Difficult choices lie ahead. And priorities will have to be set. But our commitment should be to do this together.

While the economic boom is centered on the bigger communities, like Yellowknife and Inuvik, we must ensure that smaller communities benefit through the equitable distribution of wealth and resources across the territories.

Industry will continue to expect the GNWT to provide needed infrastructure to support economic growth. It will be a major challenge to keep the winter roads going and to maintain existing infrastructure given the enormous pressure of increased traffic.

Family violence rates continue to be far beyond the national average. We need to improve this drastic situation and take individual and collective responsibility for it.

We need more social housing in every community for those in need. And we need to increase the housing supply in places like Yellowknife and Inuvik to accommodate newcomers.

We will have to pay special attention to the environment as resource development gathers momentum. Our ecology is fragile and needs protection.

I believe 2003 is be the year in which an application will be made to build the Mackenzie Valley pipeline. The Aboriginal Pipeline Group, the producers and industry will continue to negotiate the pipeline project so it can proceed with support from everyone. We will also continue making our case in Washington concerning energy subsidies and the protection of the porcupine caribou herd.

And we will, yet again, do battle with Ottawa over the unbelievable billion-dollar and rising price tag for implementing their ill advised and ill-conceived gun control legislation.

Each of these challenges is important. And each of these challenges successfully met will mean a stronger territory. But the real key to our strength and ability to meet any and all challenges is being able to make our own decisions, as Aboriginal and public governments, over our lands, resources and the wealth that they generate. Until we negotiate a fair deal with Ottawa on devolution and resource revenue sharing, true progress as a territory and for our people will remain a dream.

A have territory is our dream and working together will make it happen. The unique way we have of working together is at the heart of all we have done and all that we can do. It is our legacy and it is our future.

It is also, profoundly, our example to the young people of this territory. It is their future. In the years to come, we must continue to build an environment where the young people of Tulita and Fort Simpson, of Hay River, Lutsel'ke and here in Inuvik, indeed, young people in all of our communities, are encouraged to be the best they can be. An environment where they are encouraged to learn about their community, their territory, and the world beyond.

The message of working together, to succeed in all our diversity, is one they can take with them on their travels, one that will help them in their battles and one they can bring home to make a better tomorrow.

This message from me also comes from my family. Marie, Daylyn, Keenan, Kyla and her husband Amos. As a family, we have our share of challenges, tensions, victories and defeats, laughter and tears. But we work together and I am proud of each and every member of our family.

And that is where it starts – in our homes.

So from my home to yours, I invite you to work with me and with each other to build a great New Year, for our families, our communities and the Northwest Territories.

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