

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL MINISTERS OF JUSTICE MEETING

I rise to provide an update to my colleagues in the House about the Ministers of Justice meeting in New Brunswick last week, especially on aboriginal justice issues.

I have been working with my counterparts in Nunavut and Yukon to provide a unified northern perspective to the federal government. We have common issues. Common needs. It makes sense to work together and support each other, especially on policing and Aboriginal justice.

For many years, we have been frustrated at the federal government's inadequate funding for Aboriginal policing in the north. The provinces have reserves, and that gives them access to the flexible policing models under the federal government's First Nations Policing Policy. For years, the north has been almost completely left out of the policy, or told that it applies to us, but there's no money to implement it in our communities. In the Northwest Territories, we have four officers funded under this program. That's four officers for 33 Aboriginal communities. We could do better. We have pointed out that First Nations policing doesn't just happen on reserves. It happens where First Nations people live. We are calling on the federal government to provide additional Aboriginal policing funding for all of the jurisdictions with large numbers of Aboriginal people.

We are moving forward with work on implementing a new territorial policing policy framework. It would give us access to flexible policing and funding models. This would allow us to increase the number of aboriginal officers and encourage community members to be full participants in policing the north. The other Ministers strongly supported our work. This is key to our efforts to get a new agreement with the federal government that would acknowledge that northern policing is unique.

We want to invest in preventative measures. In culturally appropriate approaches to justice. In policing by aboriginal people for aboriginal people. That's why we're

supporting a comprehensive review of the First Nations Policing Policy. This is a national issue. And for the first time, it will recognize the unique challenges we face in the north. I am optimistic that the federal government will seek funding to sustain the program and expand it to the territories.

This is going to take persistence. This issue has been going on for a long time. However, I am encouraged by the Ministers' commitment to justice issues, and especially to the acknowledgement that we in the north are unique. I believe that with the support of our colleagues across Canada, the three northern Ministers of Justice will be able to achieve our goals.

Masi.