

Constitution must  
recognize distinct role  
of natives: Clark

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**CALGARY —** Constitutional Affairs Minister Joe Clark believes the distinctive nature of Canadian aboriginal society will never again be separated from a place in constitutional reform.

"With respect to the natives, they were here before any of the rest of us. There is a tradition of their control of their own destiny before we came.

And while Clark was encouraged by his meeting Friday with the AFN constitutional delegation, the minister recognizes the problems inherent in his agreement to accept a native constitutional process working parallel to a Commons investigation.

Both Clark and AFN National Chief Ovide Mercredi used the phrases "parallel but not separate" and "working in tandem" at their joint Friday news conference to describe how they wanted to work.

"My worries about a parallel process would be if they (became) separated because I wanted the native people to be as fully involved as possible in what we were doing," Clark said, as he told the chiefs during their closed-door meeting. "I don't want to have any major issue fall off the table.

"Out of that (concept) came, I think, an agreement."

Many of the details of the deal Clark and Mercredi agreed to still have to be settled but Ottawa has agreed to fund the process to a "reasonable" limit.