



National congress of American Indians president Ron Allen and Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine clasp hands in a victory salute last Friday after an elaborate ceremony that included smudging a historic agreement that aims to unite aboriginal peoples in Canada and the U.S., (Photo by T.L. Brant)

North American First Nations meet for ``historic document''

By Lynda Powless
Editor

VANCOUVER-More than 100 resolutions later including the approval of a new AFN logo, and filing of a \$ 1 million deficit, national Chief Phil Fontaine joined his American counterpart in signing what is being billed as a "historic agreement" between aboriginal peoples in Canada and the U.S..

After a more than two-hour elaborate ceremony at the Vancouver Convention Centre, Fontaine and Ron Allen from the National Congress of American Indians signed a protocol agreement, aimed at uniting the two groups on issues ranging from political to cultural.

AFN leader, Phil Fontaine described the signing of the "Declaration of Kinship and Cooperation" as a "historic event." He called on First Nations from across North America to join together for the collective benefit of aboriginals on both sides of the

border. The joint protocol between the Assembly of First Nations and the National Congress of American Indians ``promises one day to be referred to as a historic document," Fontaine said.

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First Nations meet for 'historic document'

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The agreement is a "first step to what we hope will be ever-increasing political, economic and cultural activities and interchanges between our national organizations, our tribes, First Nations and our peoples."

By exchanging officials and ambassadors, First Nations in Canada and the United States could better protect their legal, social, political, and economic rights, he said.

High on the agenda for joint action are social concerns and land claims, many delegates said.

Fontaine said ambassadors will eventually be appointed to Washington and the Congress will appoint ambassadors to Ottawa. Fontaine promised before any AFN ambassador is sent to Washington, "we will make sure the money is in place to pay for it."

Edmonton's Martha Campiou, treasurer of the National Association of Friendship Centres, said she wants to create awareness of social services like housing, addiction counselling and education for urban natives.

She said aboriginals need support from non-aboriginals for the betterment of all people.

"We need the support to work in unity that the Creator gave to us and to have an understanding of the Aboriginal community," said Campiou of the Driftpile Cree First Nation.

Ruey Darrow of the Fort Sill Apache Tribe in Oklahoma said her group is concerned with land claims.

"We don't have a land base in Oklahoma. Other tribes have reservations and we do not," Darrow said.

She said her ancestors were promised land for a reservation, but now the land is being grazed by livestock.

"We want to return it to its pristine condition," Darrow said.

However, representatives of several native groups say the assembly should focus on uniting with First Nations in Canada before venturing elsewhere. -CP-



An hour-long ceremony marking the first formal agreement of cooperation between aboriginal peoples in Canada and the U.S. was witnessed by Six Nations councillors Glenda Porter, Carl Hill and Terry General. Kahnawake Elder Billy Two Rivers participated in the ceremony that saw Ron Allen, president of the National Congress of American Indians and the AFN's Phil Fontaine sign the agreement.