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## CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

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### **STATEMENT FROM ONTARIO REGIONAL CHIEF ANGUS TOULOUSE ON THE UPCOMING JANUARY 24<sup>th</sup> FIRST NATIONS-CROWN GATHERING**

**Toronto, ON** – On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012, First Nations leaders will meet with Prime Minister Harper and Cabinet Ministers in Ottawa. The true value of the meeting will depend on what happens as a result. This cannot simply be a photo op for the federal government or a continuation of the agenda to avoid recognition and implementation of the rights of First Nations.

The upcoming meeting between First Nations and the government of Canada presents a valuable opportunity to restore our original relationship in accordance with the spirit and intent of the Treaties and to set in motion plans and activities aimed at facilitating the full potential of First Nations peoples and their governments.

The Treaties that were concluded, both pre and post-confederation between Indigenous nations and the British and Canadian governments, conferred specific legal obligations on the Crown and set out how land and resources would be shared. The original relationship was one of peace, friendship, mutual respect and equality.

Over time the original relationship deteriorated as a result of government policies focused on control and assimilation. First Nations were denied access to their traditional lands and from the benefits that were derived from them. The paternalistic approach employed by government over generations has badly damaged First Nations culture, systems of governance, traditional economies, families and communities. There is no doubt that the harm inflicted has been profound and deep. But we are still here --- distinct, proud and determined to move forward in a positive way. The Treaties remain the basis of the First Nations-Crown relationship and must be the foundation for a revitalized relationship going forward.

The finger pointing that occurs when reports of a First Nation in crisis reach the news does nothing to resolve the fundamental flaws in the First Nation-Government relationship. The crisis of the day will fade from the headlines but the deep-seated challenges remain. Addressing the deplorable social and economic conditions on reserves is not just the right thing to do; there are also clear financial and economic benefits for doing so, not just for First Nations but for all Canadians. It is also incumbent on the federal government to uphold the honour of the Crown in their dealings with First Nations in accordance with the conditions outlined in the Treaties.

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Although the challenges are many, they are not insurmountable. However, achieving tangible results and justice for First Nations people in this country will require courage, innovative thinking and sustained political commitment.

The upcoming January 24<sup>th</sup> First Nation-Federal Government Gathering presents an important opportunity that must not be squandered. We cannot lose another generation of First Nations children to hopelessness and despair. Now is the time for Canada to fulfill the treaty promises made to our ancestors. Now is the time to get our original relationship back on track – it is the one approach that hasn't been tried and it is the only one that has a chance of succeeding.

*The Chiefs of Ontario (COO) is a coordinating body for the 133 First Nations located within the boundaries of the Province of Ontario.*

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