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PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH ON FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Merci beaucoup! Bon matin. Good morning. National Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations, mon collègue, Bernard Valcourt, ministre des Affaires autochtones et du Développement du Nord canadien, all distinguished guests from First Nations communities from different parts of the country, from government, all of my colleagues who are going to be introduced later - there's a lot of them come from all over the country to be here, from industry, and of course, greetings to our hosts, to Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead, to the elders, councillors, teachers, students, and members of the Kainai, it is a particular delight for me to be here, and once more among the people who did me the great honour of making me one of their own. (Speaking Native language) (APPLAUSE)

Friends, we are here today because we share a common goal, the education of our children, and we have a major announcement, a historic announcement to make on this subject. In Canada, we have never had the system of First Nations education that we truly need. The federal government, which has the constitutional responsibility for this, has historically veered between at some times disinterested neglect, and at other times, arbitrary decrees. In 2008 in the House of Commons, I delivered an apology for the worst example of the latter, the policy of Indian residential schools. That was dealing with the past. Today we are dealing with the future.

Je suis enchanté d'annoncer qu'après des consultations sans précédent, notre gouvernement en est arrivé à un accord avec le chef national Atleo et l'Assemblée des Premières nations pour aller ensembles de l'avant avec une réforme exhaustive du système d'éducation des Premières

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nations, la loi intitulée « Le contrôle des Premières nations sur leur éducation ».

I'm therefore delighted to announce that after unprecedented consultations, our government has reached an agreement with National Chief Atleo and the Assembly of First Nations to move forward together with comprehensive reform of First Nations education through new legislation entitled "The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act". (APPLAUSE) The act will provide the legislative base required to ensure that youth on reserve have access to the education they need and deserve, one that is portable and meets provincial standards, incorporates aboriginal language and culture, and ensures the First Nations communities themselves have the primary responsibility for day-to-day management of schools. The legislation will end Ottawa's unilateral authority over First Nations education, while requiring First Nations communities and parents to assume responsibility and accountability for the education their children receive. And I should mention that the upcoming budget, Economic Action Plan 2014, will provide full funding for the new system. (APPLAUSE) This act does one more thing: it will finally repeal the provisions of the Indian Act that established residential schools. Therefore, friends, this truly is the beginning of a historic new path, not just for First Nations, but for all Canadians.

Now, before turning the podium over to Minister Valcourt and National Chief Atleo to explain the agreement in detail, I'd like to offer this brief reflection.

Nous faisons aujourd'hui ce qu'il faut faire pas seulement pour les communautés des Premières nations et leurs enfants; c'est la bonne chose à faire pour le Canada.

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What we are doing today is the right thing to do, not just for First Nations communities and their students; it is the right thing to do for Canada. Aboriginal youth represent the fastest growing segment of the population. Over the next decade, hundreds of thousands of young aboriginal people will be of age to enter a workforce that will need them as never before. Their talents and their ambition will be a critical part of the solution to Canada's looming labour shortage. But without an education, without an education in the kind of comparable system that we envision, too many of them will be unemployed or underemployed. We have with us today in the crowd a number of employers who have been leading the way in understanding this, and in extending job opportunities to First Nations. They are eager to work with First Nations communities across the country to create the jobs and economic opportunities that can benefit us all. They are ready to hire and train First Nations for steady, well-paying jobs. But the key to such jobs is a basic education. By investing in and improving the system of primary and secondary education on reserve, we'll be equipping First Nations youth with the tools they need to benefit from all that this great country has to offer. We step forward... the step forward we're taking today is the culmination of many years of work. Not that long after the historic apology for residential schools, I met with you, Chief Atleo, and you made clear that creating consensus and rallying support for the transformation of First Nations education would be your highest priority. Today's announcement is a testament to your vision and your tenacity. Congratulations to you, Chief, and all of those at the AFN who have worked so hard for so long with you. (APPLAUSE) On our side, you, Minister Valcourt, Bernard, took over the work initiated by your predecessors, including John, and brought to it renewed

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energy and enthusiasm, and you also deserve to feel pleased and to be congratulated. (APPLAUSE)

Établir des normes, accueillir la participation locale, et veiller à la reddition des comptes : chers amis, nous vivons un moment historique. C'est un grand jour pour le Canada, pour les communautés des Premières nations, et pour la prochaine génération.

Establishing standards, embracing local participation, and ensuring accountability: friends, this is historic, and it is a great day for Canada, for First Nations communities, and for the next generation, but it is also long overdue. So congratulations to everyone involved. I can't wait to move forward. And again, thank you all for being here. (APPLAUSE)

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