

First Nations trade mission inks tentative deals in China

Canwest News Service

Thursday, November 13, 2008

A delegation of Canadian aboriginal leaders and businessmen wrapped up a two-week trade mission to China Thursday with tentative deals that could lead to Chinese investments of several hundred million dollars in the coming years.

"This could unleash significant wealth creation for aboriginal communities," delegation chairman Calvin Helin said from Beijing.

Helin, a Vancouver lawyer, said it was too early to put a figure on the possible investments, but that they could amount to hundreds of million of dollars.

Agreements were signed with the province of Shaanxi and with the Chinese foreign affairs minister to explore investment opportunities.

Helin, who is president of the Native Investment and Trade Association, said the Chinese are particularly interested in the natural resource rich land controlled by aboriginals.

"We have a lot of resources, but there is a need for infrastructure to get access to those resources, so that is where we could both benefit from co-operation," Helin said.

British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and Manitoba would benefit the most from such investments, he said.

Helin noted that a Chinese delegation is expected to travel to Canada in the beginning of 2009 to look at business opportunities.

The mission - according to Helin, it was the largest ever undertaken by aboriginal peoples - brought together some 20 chiefs and aboriginal business leaders from British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

Helin, an outspoken advocate of economic development and sustainability for aboriginal communities, said they were received like heads of state by Chinese officials and they were introduced to major business leaders.

They also participated in a parallel trade mission of four Canadian premiers to China.

© Canwest News Service 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.