

Panelist for the:

Era 21 Networking Breakfast for Young Canadians

Mr. Jeff Copenace, Assembly of First Nations

Parliamentary Restaurant, Parliament Hill, Ottawa

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- Welcome to traditional Algonquin territory. Explain importance of traditional ceremony and protocol.
- Why are we here? What happened in 1492? Canada is a successor state and only exists on the legal basis of Treaty, as well as the kindness and generosity of our ancestors, who agreed to share the land and the waters with newcomers.
- Prior to 1492, the Indigenous Peoples of this land held their own political and governance systems built on consensus, their own traditional medicines and health systems, participated in international trade, and also maintained their own justice systems.
- History of Treaty making relationship – Treaties #1-11. Canadian approach to Treaty making different from Indigenous perspectives. Yet all Canadians are Treaty holders.
- Where are we today? 500+ missing and murdered Aboriginal women across the country. 50 communities without schools. Nearly 100 communities across the country face the same poverty as Attawapiskat First Nation. Tuberculosis rates are 33 times higher for First Nations peoples. Suicide rates are anywhere from 6-10 times higher than the Canadian average. Pikangikum First Nation has faced 33 suicides in the past five years. 80,000 housing units needed in communities. 800 nurses needed in Aboriginal communities. Nearly half of First Nations water systems are considered high risk.
- What do we do now? Revisit the historic Treaty relationship and get back to a full partnership between Canadians and our First Peoples. Education is key.
- Times are changing. Philanthropic organizations that provide aid in Africa or build homes in South America are now turning their attention to Canada's own backyard where third world conditions also exist.

- Younger generations like yourself are becoming more and more aware and are pitching in to help. No young Canadian should graduate from high school or university without an understanding of the true history of this country.
- Young First Nations are the most educated in the history of the country and more successful than ever. We now have Aboriginal Peoples serving in our highest political offices, acting as professional entertainers, professional athletes, surgeons, lawyers and business leaders.
- Successive Colonial and Confederate Canadian governments have employed policies such as the Indian Act and Residential School systems, not for the purposes of assimilation or integration – but for the purpose of eliminating our First Peoples from the land and river.
- But we are all still here. So how do we now move forward together in the kind spirit originally envisioned by our ancestors?