

First Nations Contribution To Winter Olympics Showcased By Canadian High Commission in London

By: Karen Dabrowska

A photo exhibition and video 'Aboriginal Participation and Sustainable Legacies' at the Canadian High Commission in London highlights the unprecedented Aboriginal participation in the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.



"Some people have complained that we are devoting a long time (November 25th , 2009 – April 10, 2010) to the photo exhibition rather than to art exhibitions, which is the usual practice", the security guard at the High Commission said. "But others love it and are very happy to learn about the culture of the first nation peoples". The introduction to the exhibition points out that this is the first time in the history of the Olympics that

aboriginal people have been included in all stages of planning. The four first nations (the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututu) on whose territory the games are taking place have been involved since the early bidding process.

The Vancouver Games Organising Committee claims that it has also developed strong and lasting relationships with the Inuit and Metis. Its goal is to celebrate



Aboriginal history, arts, culture and language throughout the games. Most of the photographs are devoted to first nation athletes who

skater who earned the largest number of medals for the Inuit at the Arctic Winter Games, Chelsie Mitchell a snow boarder whose



share their views about the games and the contribution of sport to the development of their people. They include Aqpit Peter an Inuit speed

long term aim is to coach and inspire Aboriginal youth, curler Travis Jones, skier Sammy Templeton, Leah Leone Sulyma

who is on an ice hockey scholarship at Northeastern University in Boston, and Marek Beaudoin a Metis biathlete from Quebec who is combing cross country skiing with shooting and has his sights set on competing in the 2014 Olympics.

The exhibition also introduces the first nations snowboarding team, the Squamish Lil Wat Cultural centre 'where rivers, mountains and people meet', in Whistler and the 2010 Aboriginal Pavilion which will be transferred to a permanent location when the games are over.

The displays at the High Commission give no hint of the controversy surrounding first nation participation in the games and portray Canada as a multicultural haven where respect and co-operation characterize relations between its peoples.

Some first nations groups say the games provide a chance to focus international attention on Canada's poor treatment of aboriginals. The rallying cry for the anti-Games movement is «no Olympics on stolen native land,» a reference to the fact that the territories in B.C.





have never been formally ceded to the Canadian government. They also say the reality of life for Canada's aboriginal community is being whitewashed by the games under the banner of new partnerships.

But Phil Fontaine a one time head of the Assembly of First Nations who now works as an adviser to Olympic sponsor Royal Bank said that the Olympics are about a "celebration of indigenous cultures" and not the best forum to highlight the chronic social problems facing aboriginal communities.

According to Justin George, the chief of the Tseil-Waututh: «The

level of participation hands down is going to be the legacy in that it's given us the opportunity to educate the world (about) who we are.

At least \$54 million has been spent by the organizing committee alone on aboriginal companies involved in venue construction, with around \$1 million more in procurement from aboriginal companies. Yet, strange as it may seem, that official aboriginal merchandise for the 2010 Olympics is being made in China.

- The British Museum is also providing an insight into Indian culture with its exhibition: Warriors of the Plains: 200 years of Native North American honour and ritual.