

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MINING AND ENERGY PROJECTS: NORTHERN PLAN

Speech by

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the organizers of the 2014 International Sustainable Industrial Processing Summit for affording me an opportunity to present to you one of Québec's most ambitious sustainable development projects. We have called the project the Plan Nord.

Allow me to provide some background before I discuss the details and key challenges of this major undertaking.

Québec is the second biggest province in Canada. Like many other territories, it has developed around the St. Lawrence River, its main tributary, which crosses the province from east to west. Most of Québec's 8 million inhabitants live in the southern part of the province.

In the northern territory, nearly 120 000 inhabitants are scattered over 1.2 million km², equivalent to over 72% of Québec's total geographic area. The Inuit, Cree, Innu and Naskapi Aboriginal nations comprise one-third of this population.

The northern territory, which the Plan Nord covers, has outstanding energy, mineral, forest and wildlife resources. It also has tourism potential and offers potential for biofood development.

In order to develop the vast territory economically and socially, in 2011 the Québec government launched *The Plan Nord: Building Northern Québec Together, The Project of a Generation*. The societal project hinges on a sustainable development approach. It calls for various activities such as mining operations, the development of renewable energy projects, and the construction of transportation infrastructure.

Development in northern Québec has slowed significantly over the past two years, in particular because of a worldwide drop in metal prices.

In 2014, the government committed itself to revive this major project and to restore confidence in order to ensure the territory's development and attract investors there.

The revival of the Plan Nord is a key societal challenge. We wish to proceed by satisfying all facets of sustainable development, i.e. social, economic and environmental.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

From a social standpoint, the government is going to maintain and foster close cooperation with all of the project's partners, including the Aboriginal communities, in order to ensure that northern development occurs in a spirit of collaboration. To this end, several task forces and partners' discussion tables are already at work.

The government will establish in the near future the Société du Plan Nord to coordinate the development of this vast territory in a respectful, participatory manner. This autonomous entity will collaborate closely with all local, Aboriginal and private-sector partners and will coordinate all of the initiatives of the government departments concerned with the Plan Nord.

The social acceptance of the natural resource development projects is a value to which we attach considerable importance. Moreover, the very concept of social acceptance is included in the recently adopted Québec *Mining Act*.

The Act makes provision for measures to maximize the attainment of social acceptance, among other things in respect of mining development projects.

For example, the Act now grants Québec municipalities the right to be consulted on possible mining projects. By allowing the municipalities to pinpoint in their territories areas that are incompatible with mining operations, we have given Quebecers the ability to control development in their territory.

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

To efficiently develop the North, we must establish the necessary infrastructure to access the territory. The government intends to invest strategically in infrastructure. We are examining scenarios to enhance the capacity of the maritime port and the rail link to facilitate freight transportation from the Labrador Trough to the Port of Sept-Îles.

From an economic standpoint, we want to do everything to maximize spinoff in all regions of Québec. For this reason, the government will integrate into the new Société du Plan Nord a marketing office, which will publicize among Québec firms needs for supplies and equipment. In this way, it will be possible to involve all of Québec's regions in northern development.

Through Ressources Québec, the government will make known the needs of major prime contractors and will guide companies in their development. This initiative will support machinery suppliers, equipment manufacturers and industrial subcontractors.

At the international level, we will conduct an extensive promotional campaign to attract foreign investments and, in particular, to revive investment in the mining sector.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Québec's objectives to combat climate change are not incompatible with northern development. The development of the North will not hamper our ambition to maintain and broaden Québec's contribution to international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

We have committed ourselves to stepping up existing efforts to develop clean technologies and promote energy efficiency.

We have also committed ourselves to protecting 50% of the northern territory. However, before we protect the territory, we will ensure beforehand that we are fully aware of its mineral potential. This measure will allow us to fully reconcile protection of the territory and the development of mineral potential. It will also dispel uncertainty among investors by obliging us to avoid sacrificing areas with high mineral potential.

In 2013, Québec adopted the *Règlement sur la restauration des sites miniers*, which increases from 70% to 100% the financial guarantee covering the estimated cost of restoring a mining site. The commitment to pay a financial guarantee upstream from a project will, from now on, be a precondition for obtaining a mining lease. Under the regulation, mining companies have two years from the start of mining operations to submit the financial guarantee necessary for its restoration.

Accordingly, under the new *Mining Act*, all mining projects without exception will be subject to a public consultation, according to directives established by the government. In the case of big mining projects, the government will automatically mandate the Bureau d'audiences publiques en environnement to conduct a consultation in the prescribed form. The mission of this independent, neutral body is to enlighten government decision-making in a perspective of sustainable development.

RESEARCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

To develop such a vast territory, it is essential to rely on rigorous scientific knowledge. In order to constantly enhance our knowledge and plan initiatives in a spirit of respect for the environment, we will establish a research and knowledge development support network in the northern territory. To this end, the government will participate in the establishment of the Institut nordique du Québec, which will serve as a significant magnet for the best technological and scientific talents, a source of social and technological innovation, and a sustainable economic lever.

The Institut will also play a unifying role among northern residents and position Québec as a national and international leader in the realm of northern research.

CONCLUSION

To revive the Plan Nord project, the Québec government intends to launch a major initiative to maximize spinoff throughout the regions and create jobs. Strategic investments and knowledge acquisition are at the forefront of the Plan Nord.

To ensure the development of the communities concerned by the Plan Nord, the government has established the Fonds du développement nordique, a special-purpose fund. The fund is dedicated to funding social measures, strategic infrastructure and measures devoted to the development and protection of the territory of northern development.

The Plan Nord reconciles our sustainable development and social acceptance principles with a societal project whose spinoff will benefit all Quebecers.

As you can see, Québec's northern development poses challenges. We intend to meet all of them by putting into practice in an exemplary manner the principles of sustainable development.

Thank you, and best wishes for the successful conclusion of the summit.