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News Release

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Yukon First Nations Lead National Conversation on Arctic Security and Defence

Traditional territories of Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (Whitehorse, Yukon) – The Yukon First Nations Defence and Security Industries Conference, hosted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Yukon Region and Yukon First Nations Chamber of Commerce, took place on April 22 and 23, 2025, marking a pivotal moment in northern defence collaboration, economic development, and Indigenous leadership in the Arctic.

The two-day event brought together First Nation governments and development corporations, defence industries representatives, Canadian Armed Forces personnel, and representatives from the federal and territorial governments. It provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, knowledge exchange, and partnership building at a time when Arctic defence and security are increasingly vital to Canada's national priorities.

The week concluded with the resounding message that Yukon First Nations must play a central role in shaping the future of Canada's Arctic.

"Yukon First Nations are not just stakeholders; we are rights holders. We have governed these lands since time immemorial, and our leadership is essential to Canada's vision for a safe, secure, sustainable Arctic," said AFN Yukon Regional Chief Kluane Adamek. "We are setting the course forward with our communities, for our communities."

There is a critical need for Yukon First Nations to play leading roles – not just as stakeholders, but as co-creators – in shaping the future of defence policy, procurement, and infrastructure in the North. To highlight this, speakers and panelists shared their diverse perspectives on topics ranging from Arctic threat assessments and First Nation security priorities to the integral roles of Indigenous women and youth in redefining what "security" means in the North.

Another key focus of the conference was to bring Yukon First Nations development corporations and businesses together with defence industry experts who have little experience working in the territory in order to identify areas of common ground and shared interest. Panel discussions and keynote presentations explored innovative ways to create shared economic value, facilitate Indigenous

participation in defence-related industries, and reimagine procurement systems to include First Nation enterprises.

"Through the conversations that took place throughout the conference, it was clear that the Yukon holds great strategic value and opportunity in our country's defence and security sectors," said David Carrière-Acco, President and CEO of Acosys Consulting, and keynote speaker of the conference. "As we work towards a future driven by shared prosperity, where Government, Industry and First Nations leaders all play their role in meaningful collaboration, I believe these opportunities within the region can be realized to their full potential."

By focusing on reconciliation, self-determination, and sovereignty, the conference laid the groundwork for long-term collaboration, investment, and leadership in critical infrastructure, emergency management, and national security planning. Discussions highlighted that Arctic security encompasses more than just defense; it also involves climate resilience, cultural preservation, and northern sovereignty.

A report summarizing key recommendations emerging from the conference will be released later this Spring. Early highlights include the need to institutionalize Indigenous involvement in defence planning, creating formal mechanisms for collaborative decision-making, recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction under modern treaties and self-government agreements, and creating educational pathways for Yukon First Nations youth to participate in defence and security sector opportunities.

"We can move forward together. Make sure the Yukon is part of all your dialogue, that Yukon First Nations leaders are sitting at all of your tables. We need this to make sure we are defending our families, our communities, our Nations and our country," explained Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Elder Lorraine Netro.

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Website: <https://afnyukon.ca/yukon-first-nations-defence-and-security-industry-conference/>