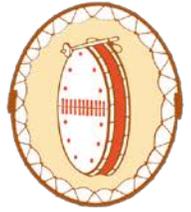




G. C. C. E. I.
est. 1974



C. N. G.
G. N. C.
est. 1978

SPEAKING NOTES

FOR

GRAND CHIEF DR. ABEL BOSUM

AT THE

SECRETARIAT TO THE CREE NATION ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE

ECONOMIC ALLIANCE CONFERENCE

ROUYN-NORANDA
JUNE 5, 2019

Madame Dallaire, Dr. Moses, friends and associates:

Wachiya, Bonjour, Good day.

It is once again my pleasure to be with you this year as we bring together again the many stakeholders and those interested in what is happening in northern Quebec. These gatherings, as you may recall, were initiated by Dr. Ted Moses when he was Grand Chief of the Cree Nation very shortly after the signature of the historic “Paix des Braves” around 17 years ago. The purpose of these gatherings was to stimulate dialogue and encourage mutually beneficial relationships among those people and those enterprises who had a deep interest in the future of northern Quebec.

These gatherings also represented a symbolic statement on the part of the Cree Nation that the “Paix des Braves” was a major turning-point in our own history. As you know, this agreement was, in large part, a commitment on the part of the Government of Quebec to fulfill its obligations under the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*—particularly in the area of economic development. It reflected a commitment to the fundamental principle underlying the JBNQA that the future of northern Quebec would play out as a result of a genuine partnership between Quebec and the Cree Nation, and that development projects proposed to take place on our traditional Cree territory would require our involvement, our participation and our consent.

Since that time, and through the continued renewal of our relationships in gatherings such as this, we have been trying to “normalize” and regularize this new reality and this new approach to development in the north. We have been trying to learn—all of us—what it means to create, and to work within the context of, a genuine partnership.

I think it would be fair to say that the key word that characterizes the development of the Cree Nation, and indeed that characterizes the history of northern Quebec and the relationship among all the residents and those interested in what happens in the north of Quebec over the past 50 years, is “evolution”. That evolution on the Cree side, from the events that led to the conclusion of our treaty, the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, has been an evolution of our understanding of our rights, an evolution of how we translated those rights into benefits for our communities and our people. It has been an evolution in the standard of living of our communities and, very importantly, an evolution of our own system of governance within our communities and within the region as a whole.

Because of that evolution of the Cree Nation, every aspect of the life of this region has been touched and changed. What we have come to realize over the course of this period of our collective history, is that in effect, we have

altered the nature of the discourse between us. We have changed the way that we talk about the region and we have changed how the different peoples within the region relate to one another.

Of course, we know that we have all entered into this evolutionary period with some baggage and we have all been in the process of shedding the parts of that baggage that are dysfunctional and that prevent us all from taking advantage of opportunities and prevent us from realizing the vision of genuine partnerships. What we have been coming to terms with collectively, and together, is what it means for us to be truly interrelated and inter-connected. It has become necessary for us to define a new region and a new way of being—economically and politically.

This new landscape we are in represents a very radical departure from the history of Indigenous peoples throughout Canada, and it is even a departure from the experience of other Indigenous peoples within Quebec.

Prior to the time of our first contact with Europeans our people were a nomadic people moving throughout our traditional territory in single or multiple family units spending our time hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. Archaeological evidence suggests that our people have inhabited Eeyou Istchee from approximately 5,000 years ago, although our own

stories and legends suggest that our people followed the receding ice masses as the ice age was coming to an end. Our legends talk about our people moving south in search of summer. So, our connection with our land may well date back to the end of the ice age.

In that pre-contact period we were completely reliant upon, and completely in tune with, the land. Everything that we did was related to the land—it was the source of our food, our shelter, our clothing, our tools, our medicines. Our ceremonies, our stories, our values, our culture, our social structures, our customs and our spirituality all derived from our connection to the land.

That very special connection to the land has remained a part of us, and an essential part of our identity throughout our history. From the time of our first contact with Europeans in 1610 at Fort Rupert, now known as Waskaganish, and through the era when the fur trade was a defining aspect of our lives, our connection to the land remained constant. Unfortunately, much of the history of our relationship with Europeans was about attempts to disrupt and sever our connection to the land. The introduction of Europeans' religion in the 1800's which viewed our own spiritual practices as inferior, combined with the creation of Canada with the Act of Confederation in 1867, and the introduction of the *Indian Act* in 1876 were all aimed at

removing us from our traditional lands so that our lands would be available to European settlers. This is exactly what we mean when we say that we were the victims of a colonial agenda. This agenda was affirmed by the introduction of the Indian Residential School System whose goal was to “take the Indian out of us” by removing us from our families, our lands, our languages and our culture. The establishment of the “reserve” system and the introduction of social assistance programs further added to this colonial effort to disrupt our sacred connection with the land. And sadly, what came with the concerted efforts of all these colonial practices was a wide range of social damages including alcohol and drug abuse, poor living conditions, marginalization, intergenerational trauma, domestic abuse, suicide, incarceration, and many diseases.

It was believed by both Canada and Quebec that all these policies and practices would pave the way for the development of the resources on our traditional territory without our being in the way—without the need to consult with us or to take into account our concerns. This was the belief at the time that Quebec announced the “project of the century”—the James Bay Hydroelectric Project. But we resisted because we believed we had rights. The courts eventually ruled that Canada and Quebec needed to negotiate with us, and the result was the *James Bay and Northern Quebec*

Agreement", a document which was our treaty, and which formed the basis of our future development.

We in Eeyou Istchee have survived all those colonial policies and colonial practices and since the signing of our treaty we have been on a mission to recreate our original sovereignty to the greatest extent possible in a contemporary context. We have been decolonizing ourselves while still maintaining our connection to the land and still insisting that the land that has sustained us for thousands of years will continue to do so. It is precisely for this reason that it may appear to those on the outside that we place a greater priority on protecting the land than on development. This is because we understand in our core that we can only survive in the long run if we protect the land that provides for us. We are not anti-development, but we retain the ideas that have served our people for thousands of years—the ideas that we are part of the environment, that we must be thankful for what we receive from the environment and that we have a duty to our future generations to protect the environment.

So this is all part of this new landscape that we are in. This landscape is political, it is economic, it is cultural, it is spiritual and it is social. Our challenge is to be respectful of our diversity, to embrace that diversity and engage with one another in appreciation of that diversity.

This new landscape that we are all working in now has, I believe, required that we create a new “public morality”. What I mean by that is that because of our increasing inter-relatedness, and because of our increasing mutual work in the development of the north, we have needed to get rid of many of the ideas, many of the habits of thinking, many of the misconceptions, and frankly, many of the unhealthy prejudices that have characterized the past.

As much as we, on the Cree side, need to continue our efforts to decolonize ourselves—to eliminate all those structures that were imposed upon us by governments that tried to control every aspect of our lives—I really believe that by doing so, we are also freeing everyone else in the region from old patterns of thinking and old patterns of relating which are not really conducive to the establishment of genuine partnerships that will be sustainable, or useful, for the long term. In this new landscape that we are all in, those old patterns simply will not work.

I would like to give you just one example of the kind of business practices that will not work in the future.

Very soon after the signing of the “Paix des Braves” we were witness to quite a significant proliferation of “joint ventures” involving people in our

Cree communities and non-Cree business interests throughout the region. In some cases, these were quite useful and legitimate business arrangements that provided the mechanism whereby our Cree entrepreneurs could successfully take advantage of contracting and other business opportunities within the region by partnering with non-Cree businesses in a way that worked for everyone and in a way that allowed each side to fulfill their various objectives.

However, in far too many cases, these were not genuine joint ventures, but simply agreements whereby non-Cree business interests used the willingness of Cree entrepreneurs to create arrangements that highly favoured the non-Cree businesses and which left our Cree entrepreneurs with significant financial liabilities. They were, in far too many cases, just “fronts” for non-Cree businesses, and the benefits for our own Cree entrepreneurs were very minimal. In the end, it is our credibility and our reputation that has been harmed by these arrangements, and in the long run, these arrangements will actually also harm the credibility of the non-Cree businesses.

We have recently undertaken discussions with Quebec regarding that section of the JBNQA that provides for priority to be given to Cree enterprises in the awarding of government contracts. Quebec has indicated to us their

willingness to establish legislation that gives teeth to that section of the JBNQA; however, there is serious skepticism about awarding contracts to joint ventures where the real Cree content has been seriously diluted. So, what we expect to emerge from these discussions with Quebec is that there will be a more realistic and appropriate definition of what a "Cree enterprise" really is, and these fake joint ventures will simply not qualify. What will emerge, in all likelihood, is a definition of a Cree enterprise that includes much more significant involvement by Cree businesses in the management and operations of joint ventures, an equalling out of the financial responsibilities and benefits between the partners, and that there will be serious attention paid to the kind of capacity-building measures on the Cree side that will result in acceptable joint ventures.

My point in mentioning this is that everything seems to be moving in the direction of the opening up of even more opportunities within the region for Cree businesses to operate, and more opportunities to give expression to the principle of genuine partnership. In a very real "dollars-and-cents" way, the new kind of "public morality" that I talk about becomes a necessary condition for genuine partnerships, and it will form the basis of more honest and mutually beneficial arrangements among our respective business interests.

Looking into the future, if we do not shed those old patterns, and if we do not create a new “public morality”, then we will all suffer as a consequence. We will suffer economically, we will suffer socially, and we will fail to take advantage of the historic opportunities that are so clearly present for all the peoples of this region and all the communities in this region.

If we do not rise to this challenge it will certainly have a negative impact on the future prosperity that we all look forward to. To survive and to prosper we must recognize that we need each other, that we need to respect each other, and we need to embrace whole-heartedly the diversity that characterizes the region. We need to shed the idea that we can take advantage of one another. We will only succeed in the grand notion of genuine partnership in the development of the north if this new morality—this new public morality—takes hold and propels us into a way of relating to each other that matches with the economic opportunities before us. Our new public morality needs to be so robust and strong that it overcomes the past and takes us all into a brave new world, and into a new era of prosperity. It needs to be a public morality that is about us and comes from us, and above all, it must be authentic.

So how do we create this new public morality? How do we create this new way of relating to one another that is both inspiring and realistic? How do

we overcome colonial ways of thinking which are dysfunctional and which prevent us from taking full advantage of the opportunities in the future? I would like to suggest that the challenge before us is a society-wide agenda. It is not just about the business community. For the business community to be able to take advantage of the opportunities before it, will require the concerted effort on the part of our societies as a whole. Our new public morality will need to be nurtured and supported by all of the tools of civil society that we have to work with. In order to succeed economically, our new public morality will need to be also about education, about our cultural institutions, our religious institutions, about our media—both institutional and social media-- , it is about all of our public institutions that contribute to shaping the way we view and think about one another. It will be about mobilizing all the ways and all the tools that our societies have to promote inclusivity and mutual respect. We cannot pretend that we can sustain mutually beneficial business relationships in a vacuum, or that they can survive in a larger social and cultural environment that is not completely supportive of positive relationships.

We must recognize that as enthusiastic as we may be about creating business ties, for those business ties to endure and to be sustainable, and for all of our communities to thrive, all of the tools in our collective tool kits must be focused on creating a climate of mutual respect and inclusion.

I can think of no better first step toward the creation of this new public morality than when the Mayor of Val d'Or, Monsieur Pierre Corbeil, led his Council to become the very first municipality in Canada to adopt the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This step was a public declaration that the city of Val d'Or would be guided by the highest international ideals with respect to human rights and that its own legal and civic actions would be consistent with those ideals. As you may know, implementation of the *U.N. Declaration* was cited as the most important recommendation of the Report of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Congratulations to you Mr. Corbeil, and we applaud you for your efforts and we acknowledge your personal interest in bringing about the kind of reconciliation that serves the whole of our society.

But we now need to build on that, and perhaps it may be useful for us to consider working together to continue to find ways to implement those recommendations among the 90-plus recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that we can do in this region. And now with the release of the Report of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, we also, and together in good faith, need to look very carefully at its 231 recommendations and decide which ones may be appropriate to implement in this region. In the end, when we talk about

genuine partnership, when we talk about the creation of a new and effective public morality that focuses on mutual respect and on inclusivity, we are in reality talking about reconciliation. And it is that reconciliation which will be the foundation for the future positive relationships among our peoples, and the foundation for our collective prosperity.

Miigwetch, merci, thank you.