

Wachiya, Kwey, Bonjour, Good afternoon.

It is of course my pleasure and honour to address this conference today, and it is good to see such a good cross-section of representatives of all the communities which make up our region of northern Quebec and Eeyou Istchee. It is clear to me from everyone's presence today, and also from this Conference agenda, that there is a wide and diverse range of peoples who have a stake in northern development, a stake in the way development takes place, a stake in who is involved and a stake in the distribution of the benefits of northern development. This indeed relates to the mandate of the Secretariat of the Cree Nation/Abitibi-Témiscamingue Economic Alliance—to facilitate effective participation by all communities that make up our region, and to make sure that northern development is inclusive, respectful of stakeholders and respectful of rights-holders within this vast region.

And this is really what I wanted to focus my remarks on today—how to ensure that the nature of the collaboration that we talk about, and the way in which we go about hearing each other, is effective and genuine. I think that we would all agree that the potential partnerships and the potential joint initiatives in developing the territory need to be based on sound principles and profoundly respectful relationships. They cannot be based on lip service and they cannot be based on any intentions of gaining advantage. We are, after all, all of us here to stay, as residents of the north we need to be aware constantly of our common interests and common challenges, and we need to be accepting of these realities as we move forward.

So, I would like to suggest a few principles today that might be worth considering as guides to how we, as residents of the north, can work together to be involved in northern development, and how we can make our collaboration more effective.

The first principle that I would like to discuss is the principle of “Sustainable Development”. We should all be aware by now that the future health of our various communities will have an important connection to the resources within northern Quebec. It is the availability of natural resources, along with market conditions, which we will all rely upon for our economic stability and growth. And it is for this reason, we cannot permit initiatives to go forward which could jeopardize our ability to continue to rely on the environment for our economic health, for ourselves and our future generations. We, on the Indigenous side, have always recognized this reality in the way in which we have engaged in our traditional pursuits and the way in which we have maintained a respectful relationship with the environment. Indeed, this is precisely why we have always characterized our relationship with the environment as “sacred”.....it is fundamental to our long-term survival.

So important has this principle been for the Cree Nation, that a careful reading of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, shows how this principle is present throughout the Agreement, and underlies many important sections of it. Also, the preamble and the operative paragraphs of *La Paix des Braves* describe how this Agreement also is based on a development model which relies on the principles of sustainable development.

At a more global level, the international community has taken the lead in crafting sustainable development strategies and approaches that have gained widespread support. Over the years, the United Nations has adopted by consensus key instruments that have contributed to a more effective strategy for sustainable development.

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus a key instrument for achieving sustainable development globally – *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

On January 1, 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into force. The U.N. resolved to end poverty and hunger, to combat inequalities within and among Nations, and to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

What was added to that declaration by the States of the United Nations was the statement that *"no one will be left behind"*. The States declared their desire to see the goals and targets of U.N. pronouncements on sustainable development be addressed by all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And, they said, we will *"endeavour to reach the furthest behind first"*.

This brings me to my second principle: that no one should be left behind. Our immediate region, and the entire northern region, consists of a wide diversity of peoples and communities which reflect a wide spectrum of standards of living.

Some of our communities are thriving and growing while others are in an unacceptable state of poverty with little prospects of things changing for them. We even have communities among us who lack the basic infrastructure for healthy living.

In our efforts to devise workable arrangements among ourselves for involvement in the development of the north, it will not serve our collective long-term interests to leave anyone behind, and it will not serve us to leave anyone out. There is sufficient wealth in the resources that our region is blessed with, that we should not accept as "normal" that there should be such vast discrepancies in the standards of living among our communities. Collectively, we are smart enough and wise enough to find ways of being more broadly inclusive in our partnerships and in our joint arrangements so that the benefits of development within the region serve to lessen the disparities in wealth and to help bring communities out of grinding poverty.

Toward this end, we need to take measures to ensure that we remain sensitive to the opportunities to encourage development projects to include not only our Cree communities, but also, the Algonquin communities and the Atikamekw communities from the surrounding territory. We should not try to hide the realities of poverty in our region, but we should address those realities together with honesty and integrity.

The third principle that I would like to mention, as important for our effective collaboration, is that there is a distinction we need to be mindful of between stakeholders and rights-holders. I mention this point as a guiding principle for us, because there is sometimes a tendency to regard Indigenous peoples as simply another stakeholder, at the same level as other "interests", whose concerns may or may not be taken into consideration when there are resource development projects on the table for discussion.

The reality is that when there are projects on the table being proposed in the context of traditional Indigenous territories, there are, in fact, different rights and different obligations that come into play. There is a duty to consult and a responsibility to accommodate. These rights have been confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada and are now recognized as a reality to be taken into account across the country. These rights, in the context of northern Quebec, place Indigenous peoples firmly at the table, and the concerns—whether environmental or economic—need to be taken seriously.

The notions of “social acceptability” and “consent” are there. However, if there is good will present, and if there is a serious effort to be inclusive of all peoples in the region when it comes to development of projects, they need not be viewed as obstacles. In fact, I would argue that the acknowledgment of Indigenous rights and the translation of those rights into arrangements that we establish that are of benefit to everyone, is what leads to smooth and effective plans for projects to move forward.

The final principle that I would like to suggest is that respectful and honourable long-term relationships are eventually more important than short-term business deals. Long-term visions of harmonious relations will more likely lead to the kind of future that is better for everyone—our communities, our peoples and our businesses—than trying to go after quick business arrangements where one side may try to take advantage of the other. Make no mistake about it, when we do not pay attention to the importance of harmonious relations, when we do not address the challenges in the region, there is no question that development will be affected.....and not for the better.

In this respect, it is absolutely essential that as we identify opportunities and approaches for collaborating in the context of business ventures, we must at the same time continue to collaborate to combat racism in all its forms and whenever it raises its ugly head.

The recent incident in Quebec City in which players, parents and referees openly expressed racism toward a Cree hockey team bears out the necessity for, here in this region to address the ongoing racism. We must also pledge to continue to support the work of the Viens Commission as a clear demonstration of our commitment in this regard.

At the same time, it would not be appropriate for me to fail to acknowledge the very important and pioneering work on the part of the City of Val d'Or, led by Mayor Corbeil, to address racism in the region. I applaud the fact that Val d'Or is the first municipality in Canada to formally adopt the *U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Although at times it may not look like it, I truly believe that we have the opportunity to show the way forward in terms of healthy and respectful relations among all the peoples in the region.

We have begun to do that with our Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government and we are committed to making that work. The past need not be the future, and the attitudes of some should not deter us from implementing a different and positive vision for our collective futures. Our mutual interest in creating sustainable and prosperous futures for our diverse communities has brought us together today and it is those interests that will require of us that we rise to the occasion and build a future that has a place for everyone.

We have assembled here today the leaders of the communities and the leaders of the business sector of this region. Our role as leaders is to look into the future and imagine the best possible future for our respective groups. Our role as leaders is also to implement initiatives designed to bring those visions into reality.

I hope you will agree with me that in order to bring about the orderly and sustainable development of all of our communities, a development that is inclusive, respectful and intended for the long-term is the only way forward for our respective interests, our mutual interests and the interests of the future generations of all our communities.

Miigwetch. Merçi. Thank you.