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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)
Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

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Cree Nation Government
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PRESS RELEASE

The Viens Commission Lays Out a Road Map for Reconciliation Between Quebec and Indigenous Peoples

Nemaska, Eeyou Istchee (September 30, 2019) – The Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee welcomes the *Final Report of the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Québec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress* (Viens Commission) released today in Val-d'Or.

As Commissioner Jacques Viens stated in his remarks today, it is fitting that the Report was released in Val-d'Or, since that is where the events leading to the creation of the Commission took place. The Cree Nation salutes the courage of the Indigenous women who came forward with their stories of abuse and misconduct. Without them, there would not have been any Commission. We owe them our thanks.

The Report is comprehensive, issuing 142 Calls for Action to eliminate and prevent discrimination and differential treatment in relations between Indigenous peoples in Quebec and the six public services covered by the Commission's mandate: police, justice, correctional services, health and social services and youth protection.

The Report makes a finding of systemic discrimination towards Indigenous peoples in these public services. This discrimination seriously affects the quality of services provided to Indigenous peoples or simply denies them any service at all.

The Calls for Action lay out a road map for reconciliation between Quebec and Indigenous peoples. They offer detailed, practical measures to improve relations between public service providers and Indigenous peoples, including the following:

- **Public Apology:** Many Indigenous witnesses stated that there can be no reconciliation until the wrongs of the past are acknowledged. The Commission has heard their voice, and has called on the Government of Quebec to make a public apology to members of First Nations and Inuit for the harm caused by laws and policies, standards and the practices of public service providers.

- **UNDRIP:** The Commission calls on the Government of Québec to work with Indigenous authorities to enact legislation to guarantee that the provisions of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Québec* (UNDRIP) will be taken into account in its legislation, a measure long sought by the Cree Nation.

- **Housing:** The Commission states that the serious Indigenous housing crisis has emerged at the epicentre of many of the issues faced by the First Nations and Inuit. The Commission calls on Quebec to work with the federal government so that both financially support the development and improvement of housing in all indigenous communities in Québec.

The Cree Nation applauds this key finding of the Commission; it supports our own recommendations made before the Commission. Until the housing crisis in Indigenous communities is addressed, no lasting progress will be made in addressing the social, health and economic issues facing Indigenous peoples. We are ready to work with Quebec and Canada to meet this challenge.

- **Justice and Police:** The Cree Nation strongly supports Calls for Action 46 and 48 to stop the incarceration of vulnerable and homeless persons for non-payment of fines for municipal offences. We also support Call for Action 38 to extend the time limit for complaints of police misconduct from one to three years.

- **Implementation Monitor:** The Cree Nation strongly supports the Commission's Call for Action to mandate the Quebec Ombudsman to monitor the implementation of the Report's Calls for Action to ensure that they do not simply gather dust.

- **Culture:** Many deficiencies in public services are caused by a lack of knowledge of Indigenous reality. We welcome the Commission's recommendation to raise awareness of Indigenous reality through education and training in the schools, professions and public services, including the police.

- **Specific Sectors:** The Commission's report sets out concrete Calls for Action for specific service sectors, including the police, justice, corrections, health and social services and youth protection. Many of these recommendations concern cultural attitudes and the need to train service providers in Indigenous realities.

Quote by Grand Chief Abel Bosum:

"*The Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee welcomes the Final Report of the Viens Commission as a road map to reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Government of Quebec. We thank Commissioner Viens and his colleagues for their diligence, integrity and sensitivity throughout the Commission's mandate.*

We will review carefully the Report's Calls for Action, and will cooperate with Quebec to ensure their prompt implementation. We are already working very hard to address the housing crisis in the Cree communities through our innovative Cree Nation Housing Strategy. We invite Quebec to partner with us and Canada in this effort."

- 30 -

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