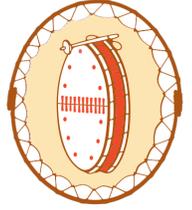




G. C. C. E. I.
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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

FOR

GRAND CHIEF DR. ABEL BOSUM

FOR THE OPENING OF THE

CREE NATION SUMMIT ON BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EYYOU ISTCHEE

[MONTREAL, QC: OCTOBER 22, 2019]

Wachiya, Good Morning.

Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs, Deputy Grand Chief, Youth Grand Chief, Councillors, Chairs and Presidents of the Cree organizations, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank everyone for making the effort to attend what I think will be a very special gathering. I hope that what you hear over the course of this summit about the relationship between two important initiatives—“unlocking the wealth” of the Cree Nation, and Capacity-building—will resonate with you, and will be of the highest interest and value especially for our youth. I also hope that what we hear during this Summit encourages us all to **act**....encourages us all to do what we can to promote this vital initiative : Capacity Building for Eeyou Istchee.

I would first of all like to acknowledge the hard work on the part of those individuals who have remained committed to the work of building Cree capacity. From the time we organized our first Roundtable on Capacity-Building in Ottawa in 2013, there is a core of individuals who have met regularly, who have initiated a number of important projects related to the enhancement of our capacity-building efforts, and who have been involved in the organizing of this Summit. They are to be commended, congratulated and we must express our gratitude for their dedication to what must be among the very highest priorities of the Cree Nation. I would very briefly like to

mention Darryl Diamond, Nian Matoush, Louisa Saganash, Alex Moses, and Sheila Weapenicappo and express to them my personal thanks for making sure that this initiative has continued to occupy a central focus for the Cree Nation.

I wanted to mention to everyone today that I had the privilege 10 days ago of being in Chisasibi where I was able to participate in the announcement and the signing of a new Health Agreement between the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, the Cree Nation Government, and the Government of Quebec. Through this Agreement, we have secured additional funding for the Cree Health Board which will be applied toward a combination of capital projects, new programs and services, and perhaps most importantly, funding will be available to construct the first modern hospital in Eeyou Istchee, with modern equipment for the doctors, nurses, and specialists who will be working in this new hospital. We have argued for a very long time that the closer that important institutions such as a new hospital are located near our people, the more effective they will be, and the more responsive our Cree Health Board will be in addressing the needs of our people. This will be an example of our work, and our promise, to bring the benefits home.

I mention this new Health Agreement to you because there are many important lessons to learn from this achievement, and similar lessons to learn

from other agreements we have concluded in the areas of governance, education, justice, policing, daycare, and many more. What I would like to do is focus my remarks on those lessons that these Agreements have for our youth and for our capacity-building agenda.

With some degree of struggle since the signing of the JBNQA in 1975, we have, over the last 45 years, made it possible for our people, and especially our youth, to dream big about their futures. We have begun to see the fruits of these struggles in who our people are today. We now have among us Cree accountants, Cree lawyers and Cree doctors. These individuals have begun to show the way—they have shown that big dreams can be achieved and that we can do it with all of us working *chiiyaanu*—together, to encourage and support our youth. This time period has been defining....it has been pivotal, and it has changed us forever.

A world of opportunity is now before us as a Nation as the possibility for a wide range of engagement in the governance of our communities, the governance of our Nation and our region, and as a result, the possibilities for meaningful employment, for contracts, and for investments—these have all become very real and within our reach.

Our most critical responsibility is to ensure that our people are prepared and competent to take advantage of all these opportunities and to be successful in our performance once we have secured these opportunities. If the Cree Nation does not take advantage of these opportunities, they will be seized by others and we Cree people will be left watching other people reap the benefits and we will be passive observers. But this is not what we want, and this is not why our Cree Nation has struggled for so many decades. We did not struggle only to fail....we have struggled to succeed. And this is why, right now, we are at a crucial crossroad.

So, of course, our efforts to encourage and promote our young people to successfully complete relevant Post-secondary studies have become absolutely key to the future of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee. It is for this reason that we have for a number of years declared “capacity-building” as perhaps the major priority of the Cree Nation, and we have been working to mobilize all our Cree entities to support this initiative. We have an obligation to make sure that all of us—in our families, in our communities, in our Cree Nation Government, and all our entities are paddling in the same direction. We will continue this initiative with all our energies so that the opportunities are not lost.

The growth of our very unique Indigenous Nation requires that we have people trained to work in every aspect of the life of our communities and the life of our region. We now have the resources not only to support our youth to obtain relevant skills and education, but we also have the resources and the ability to eventually find the right avenues for our youth to be able to apply those skills in the context of real jobs. When our youth take advantage of these possibilities, and when the leaders of our Cree entities create the space for our youth to apply newly-gained skills and education, our youth will then be able to contribute to their own financial security, the security of their families, and they will contribute to their communities, and they will also be contributing to our collective effort of our Cree Nation in becoming “masters of our own destiny”.

When I take a step back, and try to see the “big picture” ahead for the Cree Nation, here is what I see:

I see job opportunities in our local First Nation Governments.....I see jobs available in our Cree Nation Government, jobs in our Cree School Board, jobs in our Cree Health Board, jobs with Air Creebec. Just in these areas alone—within our own Cree entities—I see as many as 5,000 possible jobs.

When I look ahead to the future, and when I see what is taking place within our traditional territory in the areas of mining, forestry, hydroelectric industries, and other development activities, I see over 2,000 potential jobs that our own people could be involved in. And, of course, there are countless numbers of jobs that could be available in the potentially huge area of small and medium-sized businesses. Our own current, and future, entrepreneurs could now be starting up many of these businesses and employ many of our people.

And then, when I look ahead at the potential professional jobs that could be available to our Cree people in fields including the legal profession, accounting, the medical profession, social work, psychology, engineering, geology, consulting, I see at least 500 more career opportunities available.

And when I look at the areas of transportation, construction, and tourism within our region, I see the potential for as many as another 2,500 jobs....jobs that **could** be there for our people, and jobs that **should** be occupied by our people. So, just at a very quick glance, I see as many as 10,000 jobs within the territory where we exercise some jurisdiction, and within which we Cree people should be enjoying the benefits. This is **our** time, and this is **our** historic opportunity.

When I look at our “big picture”, here is what I see: We have opened up so many opportunities for our people, there should be no place for unemployment in our communities.....there should be no place for poverty within our midsts....there should be no place for alienation among our youth....there should be no place for boredom and apathy among our young people. Instead, we should see excitement, anticipation and inspiration knowing that we in the Cree Nation—at this moment in our history—are true pioneers.

We have made the area of housing a major priority for the Cree Nation. This housing strategy has enormous potential for stimulating our local Cree economies while, at the same time, creating employment and solving a number of persistent social issues related to overcrowding. This strategy is comprised of both a home ownership component and a social housing component. It is my expectation that the home ownership component will be approved by the Board/Council in December and ready for implementation by April 1, 2020. One of the important consequences of implementing our housing strategy is that we will be in a position to address the housing needs of our young people who go off for college and university and come back looking for jobs and housing. We are working together with the Cree School Board and the Cree Health Board to ensure that creating housing opportunities will make it more attractive for our young people to actually return to their communities and give them a sense that they are wanted and appreciated.

This is yet another example of how, *chiiyaanuu*—together—we can, and how we must, work to bring the benefits home.

Our Free Trade Agreement, that you will see again tomorrow, is another tool for us to ensure that our hard-earned economy and benefits cycle within our region, that opportunities are given to our fellow Cree First Nation neighbor, instead of another region, without Cree labour or contracting opportunities. Opportunities for our communities are now inevitable, it will be up to us to build our tool box and be prepared to maximize benefits for our community members and their families.

The most important resource we have, is our youth, our people. As a leader, I cannot express to you how anxious I am to support our youth in fulfilling their personal dreams.

To be honest, we are expecting a great deal from our youth. If we are expecting our youth to make significant sacrifices for what we say is the future development of the Cree Nation, then we ourselves must also be prepared to make some sacrifices. We, of course, need to make sure that once our young people have taken the initiative....once they have set their sights on a course of study.....and once they have made the sacrifices necessary for success, that

we....all of us....in our communities and in our Cree entities must work hard to make sure that they will be able to apply their educations and training in the context of real jobs when they return home.

In fact, now is the time for all of us to be dreaming "big", not just our youth. We need to believe that each and every one of us has a role to play in realizing our ambitious vision. We cannot afford to just point fingers and say that it is someone else's responsibility. Even in our families, our parents can play a very huge role by just encouraging our children, particularly in the early elementary phase, to learn lots, to work hard and to succeed. In our schools, we need to adopt a much more focussed approach and invest in preparing our youth to succeed in exactly those areas that we know will provide future careers and employment. As I have mentioned before, we are all in this together....we are all in the same boat.....we all need to grab a paddle....and we all need to be paddling in the same direction.

In fact, what one of the outcomes of this two-day event is that you will have an opportunity to break out into groups and we would like all of the communities to come up with calls to action. These will be calls to action that come from our First Nation leadership and will complement the initiatives coming from our Cree Nation Government and our Cree entities.

Our Cree Nation has not achieved what we have achieved by staying within the box. We have made our achievements because we have dared to be bold and we have been courageous to struggle and to innovate in order to achieve our vision. We have not accepted meagre handouts and minimal recognition of our rights. We dreamed big and we put in the work to realize those dreams. That's how it works. If there are no big dreams, there are no big accomplishments. And what is true for a Nation is also true for individuals. Let us tell our youth to believe in themselves and challenge them to let their passion be their guide and challenge them to commit themselves to hard work. That, after all, is the Cree way....and that is the way to success. We all have a role to play in bringing home the benefits – now let's have a productive summit.

Miigwetch.