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The Québec Government and the Cree Nation sign a Grand Alliance

The Québec Government and the Cree Nation will collaborate to carry out an ambitious infrastructure plan in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory

Montréal, February 17, 2020 – Québec Premier François Legault and Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and Chairman of the Cree Nation Government, Dr. Abel Bosum, officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding on collaborative, long-term, balanced economic development in a spirit of respect for Cree values in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory. The Québec Government welcomes the ambitious project put forward by the Cree Nation, which is in keeping with Premier Legault's desire to broaden the collaboration initiated in 2002 through the *Agreement Concerning a New Relationship Between le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec*, commonly referred to as the *Paix des braves*.

They were accompanied by the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs, Sylvie D'Amours, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Jonatan Julien, the Minister of Justice and Minister Responsible for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs and the Canadian Francophonie, Sonia LeBel, as well as Deputy Grand Chief and Vice-Chair Mandy Gull, and the Chiefs of the Eeyou Istchee Cree First Nations.

A Grand Alliance that will directly benefit communities in the region and in neighbouring regions

The project stems from a patient consultative process with the Cree communities and calls for:

- the extension of the rail network to promote economic development and reduce the impacts of trucking;
- the electrification of certain industrial projects;
- the sharing of infrastructure in the territory;
- local labour force training;
- the identification of new protected areas conducive to the connectivity of the territory's wildlife habitats.

It is anticipated that the plan will extend over a period of 30 years to ensure the predictability and stability of the economic and social development of the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory and Québec overall.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed today will lead to a sweeping technical and financial feasibility study for phase I of the project and to pre-feasibility studies for phases II and III.

“We are initiating a new chapter in the relationship of trust and collaboration that unites Québec and the Cree. This Memorandum of Understanding proves that it is possible to work together on ambitious socioeconomic development projects and take advantage of Northern Québec’s vast mining potential for the benefit of both our nations, in a spirit of respect for the environment, the territory and Indigenous values. This balance is important. It is part of the long-term perspective that the Cree Nation Government has envisaged and reflects our desire to jointly build a greener, more prosperous and prouder Québec.”

François Legault, Premier of Québec

“This Memorandum of Understanding marks just the first stage in an ambitious process to transform Eeyou Istchee’s infrastructure and economy. The project will help to unlock the wealth of the region’s varied natural resources and create jobs and business opportunities for the Cree and James Bay residents, while protecting the environment and wildlife. It paves the way to a bright future for our young people by giving them the necessary confidence to build their lives and start families in Eeyou Istchee. The Memorandum of Understanding gives genuine meaning to the nation-to-nation partnership between the Eeyou Istchee Cree and Québec provided for in the 1975 *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* and reaffirmed by the *Paix des braves* in 2002.”

Abel Bosum, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and President of the Cree Nation Government

Relations between Québec and the Cree:

- In 1975, the Québec and federal governments, the Cree and the Inuit signed the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA), the first so-called modern comprehensive land claim treaty. The JBNQA covers a territory of roughly 1 million km², equivalent to roughly 65% of Québec’s territory. It spurred the rapid development of the Cree Nation by recognizing defined rights and advantages, including land, government responsibilities and the funding necessary to facilitate self-management, as well as certain indemnities.
- In 2002, the Québec government and the Cree Nation signed the *Peace of the Braves*, an agreement that serves as a historic model from the standpoint of relations between the government and the Aboriginal nations. The agreement has resulted mainly in the emergence of Cree expertise in the realm of economic development, job creation and Cree-Québec collaboration on the management of the James Bay territory.
- On the foundation of the *Paix des braves*, in 2012 the Cree and the Québec government signed the *Agreement on Governance in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory*, stemming from the desire to modernize the governance structures created by the JBNQA by establishing a new public management model in the territory at the municipal and supra-municipal levels, with the shared participation of the Cree and James Bay residents, to foster respectful, harmonious, constructive relations in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory.
- The Premier’s willingness to draw inspiration from the *Paix des braves* to sign new agreements centred on economic development with the First Nations of Québec and that of the Cree Nation to carry out an ambitious strategic infrastructure plan to be rolled out in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory afford an opportunity to form a Great alliance that will reconcile economic and social development, environmental protection and harmonious cohabitation.
- The infrastructure program comprises three phases that can be carried out over a period of 30 years through new government investments.

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