



**Commemorating the 45th Anniversary of the Signing of our Treaty–
the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement, November 11, 1975**

The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) was signed on November 11, 1975 by the Government of Québec, the Government of Canada, Hydro-Québec, the Grand Council of the Crees of Québec and the Northern Québec Inuit Association. Described by many as the “first modern treaty,” the JBNQA created a new legal and eventually a constitutional framework for, among other things, local self-governance, land management, protection of the traditional Cree way of life as well as the relationship between the Québec and the Indigenous peoples of the James Bay and Northern Québec region.

The Agreement was signed within a very unique historical context—the ambition on the part of Québec to develop the James Bay hydroelectric potential and the determination on the part of the Crees and the Inuit to protect our lands and advocate for our rights. Over the last 45 years, our leaders have worked diligently to ensure that no development can take place on our traditional lands without our engagement and involvement.

Most importantly, our Treaty created the foundation upon which we have continued to build and grow for four-and-a-half decades. In 1975 our nation numbered 6,000 and today we are 20,000 strong in 11 communities. Our growth has been made possible by the vision, the determination

and the strength of our leaders who have undertaken difficult struggles to ensure that our rights as Indigenous people and as Crees would be given full expression.

It was on that foundation that we have been able to conclude over 80 subsequent agreements including some very major agreements which have extended the scope of the self-governance of our communities and the territory. Among these major additional agreements are the "Paix des Braves" with Québec, New Relationship Agreements with Canada, additional governance agreements with Canada and Québec, and other significant initiatives such as the recent "Grande Alliance".

These thoughtful agreements and our tenacity helped transform and modernize our communities. In combination, all these advances have brought us to a point in our historic evolution where we are able, more and more, to direct our own future and chart our own course, armed with our traditional knowledge, culture, language, values, and focussed on the best interests of our people, our communities and our Nation.

Nowhere has the significance of the cumulative result of all these achievements, and nowhere has the value of all these milestones become more evident than in the way in which we have been able to address the COVID-19 pandemic which we currently find ourselves in.

It is precisely because of the advances we have made in governing ourselves that we have been able to put into place the measures that have been adapted to our own circumstances, our own needs and our own approach to securing the safety and the health of our people. We have not simply incorporated the recommendations and the precautionary measures that have been developed for regions of Québec that are vastly different from our own, but instead, we have engaged our own experts in our Cree Health Board's Public Health Department, together with our communities, to develop the measures and precautions that address the unique and distinct needs of our communities.

Let there be no mistake. We could not have undertaken these special measures without the resources, without the Cree governance framework, and without the nation-building vision of our leadership and people. We have gradually, over the course of the last 45 years developed the tools and the knowledge to be able to address the current challenges in a way that reflects the concerns and the needs of our people.

It is in this context that we once again express our gratitude to our people's fearless vision and to the leaders of the past 45 years and that we celebrate this anniversary of the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement.

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Dr. Abel Bosum, Grand Chief/Chairperson
Mandy Gull, Deputy Grand Chief/Vice-Chairperson

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