

[Press release]

Public Inquiry Commission on Relations Between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services Releases Report

(Val-d'Or, September 30, 2019). The Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec: listening, reconciliation and progress releases the report submitted to the government at the completion of its mandate.

Commissioner Jacques Viens' findings are unequivocal. First Nations and Inuit peoples in Québec are indeed victims of systemic discrimination in their relations with the public services investigated. As stated by the Commissioner: "While the problems may not always be systemic, the Commission's hearings have made one thing evident: current structures and processes show a clear lack of sensitivity to the social, geographical and cultural realities of Indigenous peoples. In some cases, this lack of sensitivity manifests as a complete lack of service, which leaves entire populations to their own devices, with no ability to act in order to remedy the situations. More than their rights, thousands of people are being robbed of their dignity because they are forced to live under deplorable conditions, deprived of their own cultural references. In a developed society such as ours, this reality is simply unacceptable."

In a call for reconciliation and a new balance of forces, the Commission's report puts forward 142 measures, several of which stem from findings that apply to all services investigated. One of these recommendations is the adoption by the National Assembly of a motion to recognize and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the adoption of a law to ensure that the provisions of this Declaration are incorporated into Québec's legislative corpus.

These two calls to action set the groundwork for all other proposed cross-disciplinary measures, from prioritizing Indigenous peoples in population research, to improving living conditions, removing language barriers to access, supporting and assisting the First Nations and Inuit in their relations with public services, and providing training and information for both citizens and professionals.

Specific recommendations were also made for each of the public services investigated by the Commission. These include:

- Granting Indigenous police forces the same status as other police organizations in Québec, and modifying the resulting financial resource allocation process;
- Concluding agreements on the creation of specific administration of justice systems with Indigenous nations, communities or organizations operating in urban areas;
- Developing an assessment tool specific to Indigenous offenders in correctional settings;
- Increasing access to many health and social services in both urban and Indigenous settings;

and finally

- A real commitment and support for the conclusion of agreements with Indigenous nations and communities on implementing a special youth protection program.

For the first time in Québec, the report also suggests implementing follow-up measures, the first of which entrusts the Québec Ombudsman with the responsibility to assess and monitor the implementation of all proposed calls for action until they are fulfilled. From a citizen watch standpoint, the Commissioner also recommended that the Commission's summary report be translated into Indigenous languages, and be used in a cultural mediation exercise that incorporates the oral tradition of Indigenous peoples.

Created in December 2016 by the Government of Québec, the Public Inquiry Commission was mandated to investigate and carry out all necessary analyses to make recommendations to prevent or eliminate, regardless of origin and cause, all forms of violence, discriminatory practices and differential treatment imposed on Indigenous peoples in the delivery of public services. Five public services were investigated: police, justice, corrections, health and social services, and youth protection services. The decree also specified that the investigation should cover the past 15 years.

At the conclusion of the work, the eleven nations had been visited, as well as the majority of First Nations and Nunavik communities. As a result, 765 witnesses were heard over the 38 weeks of hearings. More than 400 other people also shared their stories through written statements. In total, more than 1,000 individuals were able to participate in the work spanning from December 2016 to September 2019.

Those who wish to do so may review all of the evidence heard, as well as the statements and documents filed in evidence on the Commission's website at www.cerp.gouv.qc.ca. The Commission's report is also available at the same address, in French and English.

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