



STATEMENT BY

GRAND CHIEF DR. ABEL BOSUM

OF THE

GRAND COUNCIL OF THE CREES (EYYOU ISTCHEE) /

CREE NATION GOVERNMENT

TO THE

PUBLIC INQUIRY COMMISSION

ON RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

AND CERTAIN PUBLIC SERVICES IN QUEBEC:

LISTENING, RECONCILIATION AND PROGRESS

MISTISSINI, EYYOU ISTCHEE

JUNE 20, 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	ORIENTATIONS	1
	A. TAKING INDIGENOUS NATIONS SERIOUSLY	1
	B. BREAKING DOWN SILOS – AN INTEGRATED APPROACH	2
	C. JORDAN’S PRINCIPLE – DENIAL OF SERVICES IS A FORM OF DISCRIMINATION	5
	D. LEARNING FROM OTHERS.....	7
III.	SPECIFIC SECTORS	7
	A. POLICE.....	8
	1. NON-INDIGENOUS POLICE	9
	2. INDIGENOUS POLICE FORCES	12
	B. ATTACKING A ROOT PROBLEM – HOUSING	12
	C. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.....	15
	D. EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING	16
	E. CREE HUNTERS AND TRAPPERS.....	16
	F. TRADITIONAL CREE CULTURE	17
IV.	CONCLUSION	17

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Commissioner Viens, on behalf of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to you and your colleagues on this Public Inquiry Commission for your presence here in Mistissini over the past two weeks.
2. Over the past months, the Commission has received a vast amount of evidence from dozens of witnesses, including more than 600 exhibits. We will be reviewing this material carefully over the coming months in order to submit a detailed brief and specific representations to the Commission this fall.
3. My colleague Bill Namagoose will provide you in his presentation with the Cree perspective on our treaty, the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*, and the evolution of Cree governance since 1975. My comments will address some broad orientations on certain structural issues as well as some specific sectors.
4. The Cree approach has historically been orientated towards problem-solving and proposing solutions. This approach has served the Cree Nation well over the past 40 years. It is the approach that we intend to follow with the Commission as we work together to identify what Donald Nicholls, our Director of Justice and Correctional Services, has called “paths forward”, or what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called “Calls to Action”.

II. ORIENTATIONS

A. TAKING INDIGENOUS NATIONS SERIOUSLY

5. You will note in Mr. Namagoose’s presentation a slide entitled “Cree Nation Taken Seriously”. Over the past 50 years, much of the struggle of the Cree Nation has been simply to be taken seriously. That means being recognized as an autonomous Indigenous Nation, with our own responsible government, our own institutions, our

own laws (as discussed by Paul John Murdoch on June 18), our own culture and our own ways of doing things. Taking Indigenous people seriously means treating us as adults. Simple to say, but apparently hard to do for some non-Indigenous institutions.

6. Many of the problems that we are wrestling with today comes from a long history of treating Indigenous people like irresponsible children, wards of the State who don't know what's good for them. That led to racist experiments like the residential schools, breaking the bonds of family across entire generations of Indigenous communities. Our people are still living with the legacy today, decades later. Many of the issues being addressed by the Commission stem directly from this experience.
7. If the Cree experience shows anything, it is that, after the shock of the James Bay Project, Cree life began to improve when we brought Governments to take us seriously. That is what we mean by a Nation-to-Nation relationship, one based on the respect due to equal, adult partners, not the paternalism shown to wayward children. Treating people with respect builds their self-respect, a vital ingredient in addressing the issues before the Commission.

B. BREAKING DOWN SILOS – AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

8. Professors Céline Bellot and Marie-Eve Sylvestre of the Observatoire sur les profilages made it clear in their December 2016 report that a lack of coordination between different services is hindering an effective response to the needs of Indigenous people in urban centres like Val-d'Or:¹

4. Generally speaking, social and health services are insufficient and not enough consolidated to respond to the high and complex psychosocial needs of the population of Val d'Or. Although the situation has improved since October 2015, there is a lack of coordination and linkages between the different social services and intervention sectors. Social actors appear to be responding to the most urgent

¹ Céline Bellot and Marie-Eve Sylvestre, Observatoire sur les profilages, *The Judicialization of Homelessness in Val d'Or, Executive Summary*, December 2016 (“**Val-d’Or Report**”), p. 1 (French version Exhibit P-057).

needs, repeatedly, running the risk of conditions and social problems becoming chronic.

[Emphasis added]

9. Professors Bellot and Sylvestre therefore recommend an integrated approach in responding to the needs of homeless Indigenous persons in our cities:²

Community resources should be better coordinated both to respond to emergency situations as well long term social needs. Such resources must be adapted to Indigenous people in accordance with their culture and legal traditions. These services should include mental health services, harm reduction programs in the case of alcohol, as well as specific programs for vulnerable women.

[Emphasis added]

10. The Cree Nation Government supports this integrated approach. As pointed out in its brief of last September,³ our Department of Justice and Correctional Services is collaborating with the Cree Board of Health and Social Services in the construction and operation of two Women's Shelters. Operations at the "Robin's Nest" in Waswanipi were inaugurated last September, while construction of the Women's Shelter in Waskaganish is to be completed this year.
11. We are also partnering with the Cree Health Board for the construction and operation of a Youth Facility in Mistissini for detention, training, rehabilitation, prevention and engagement for Cree youth. And we are working with the Cree School Board in providing educational and cultural activities for Cree youth at risk. We have found that this cross-sector approach is not just helpful, but essential, in addressing some of the challenges under consideration by this Commission.
12. The Government of Quebec appears to favour a similar coordinated approach. In June 28, 2017, the Government of Quebec released *Do More, Do Better – Government Action Plan for the Social and Cultural Development of the First*

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ Exhibit P-055, September 15, 2017.

Nations and Inuit 2017-2022 (“**Action Plan**”). In it, Quebec indicates that it intends, for the first time, to consolidate the services and programs offered by its various Departments to or for Indigenous communities.

13. We can only support the principle of such an integrated approach. At the same time, we must note our concern with an apparent preoccupation with constitutional issues. The Action Plan states that it must take into account the constitutional framework under which Canada has primary responsibility for community services on reserves. This situation, according to the Action Plan, imposes objective limits on Quebec’s intervention, due to its limited jurisdiction and resources.⁴

14. A Consultation Document for the Action Plan initiative was released in January 2017.⁵ It also discusses the provision of public services to Indigenous people in terms of a “special legal context”.⁶

Secondly, the action plan must be established in compliance and complementarity with federal and provincial powers. With regard to services (health, education, employment, housing, etc.), the provincial government becomes responsible once the applicant is no longer living on a reserve recognized under the *Indian Act*. The Government of Quebec recognizes that adapting its response to the needs of this growing clientele—a group whose singular cultural traits place it among society’s most vulnerable members—calls for the right tools.

[Emphasis added]

15. This passage explicitly states that Quebec’s responsibility for services (health, education, employment, housing, etc.) to Indigenous persons starts when they stop living on reserve. It asserts that the responsibility for such services in the communities lies primarily with the federal government, limiting Quebec’s capacity to act. This focus on jurisdictional issues hinders achieving the Action Plan’s stated objectives of improving living conditions for Indigenous populations and improving access to Quebec’s public services.

⁴ Action Plan, p. 16.

⁵ Secrétariat aux Affaires autochtones, *Government Action Plan for the Social Development of Indigenous Peoples – Consultation Document*, December 22, 2016 (“**Consultation Document**”).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

16. We must take issue with this point of view. Our treaty, the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* (“**JBNQA**”), shows that constitutional concerns not need stand in the way of effective service integration. Under the JBNQA, the Cree work with both Canada and Quebec as partners in ensuring health and social services, education, police, justice and community and economic development in the Cree communities.
17. There is no reason why the same comprehensive approach cannot be taken in other Indigenous communities in Quebec. We must break down silos, whether administrative or jurisdictional, in order to offer effective services to Indigenous peoples, not retreat behind constitutional walls.

C. JORDAN’S PRINCIPLE – DENIAL OF SERVICES IS A FORM OF DISCRIMINATION

18. In our view, to deny services based on constitutional or jurisdictional issues amounts, in practice, to discrimination against Indigenous people. Jordan’s Principle supports this view, and offers a “path forward”.
19. The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society summarizes Jordan’s Principle like this:⁷

Jordan’s Principle is a child-first principle named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. Born with complex medical needs, Jordan spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital while the Province of Manitoba and the federal government argued over who should pay for his at home care. Jordan died in the hospital at the age of five years old, never having spent a day in his family home. Jordan’s Principle aims to make sure First Nations children can access all public services in a way that is reflective of their distinct cultural needs, takes full account of the historical disadvantage linked to colonization, and without experiencing any service denials, delays or disruptions because they are First Nations.

Payment disputes within and between federal and provincial governments over services for First Nations children are not uncommon. First Nations children are

⁷ <https://fncaringsociety.com/jordans-principle>.

frequently left waiting for services they desperately need, or are denied services that are available to other children. This includes services in education, health, childcare, recreation, and culture and language. Jordan's Principle calls on the government of first contact to pay for the services and seek reimbursement later so the child does not get tragically caught in the middle of government red tape.

[Emphasis added]

20. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has issued a series of orders requiring Canada to apply Jordan's Principle to all First Nations children living on and off reserve. The Caring Society has prepared a summary of the Tribunal's non-compliance orders issued to Canada.⁸ The summary states, in part:

2. As of May 26, 2017, Canada will start using a definition based on the following principles:

i. Jordan's Principle applies equally to all First Nations children both on and off reserve and is not limited to First Nations children with disabilities, or short-term issues creating critical needs for health and social supports.

ii. Jordan's Principle applies to all government services and ensures that there are no gaps in government services to First Nations children.

iii. The government department of first contact will pay for the service to a First Nations child without engaging in administrative procedures before funding is provided.

[...]

v. A jurisdictional dispute between departments or between governments is not a necessary requirement for the application of Jordan's Principle.

[Emphasis added]

21. Jordan's Principle, we suggest, should be adapted for application, not just to services for Indigenous children, but to all services for all Indigenous persons, whatever their age and wherever they live, on or off reserve.

⁸ First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, *Information Sheet, Jordan's Principle, Summary of Orders from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal*, Case Reference: 2017 CHRT 14 (May 26, 2017 – revised March 26, 2018 to reflect amended orders): <https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/Summary%20of%20Jordan%27s%20Principle%20Orders%20%282018%20update%29.pdf>.

22. The point of Jordan's Principle is that jurisdictional issues cannot be allowed to result in the denial of essential services to First Nations people, whatever their age and wherever they live, on or off reserve. We recommend that all interested Governments, Indigenous, federal and provincial, work together to apply Jordan's Principle so as to provide effective, integrated services to all Indigenous people, without regard to their residence on or off reserve.

D. LEARNING FROM OTHERS

23. Learning from others may seem an obvious point, but it is worth stating anyway. Part of the purpose of this Commission of Inquiry is to gather evidence, not just of problems, but of solutions. Many of the issues of discrimination towards Indigenous people in Quebec have been experienced elsewhere in Canada. So, in our search for solutions, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. We can learn from the experience of others, across Canada, and be guided by best practices in preventing and eliminating discrimination in the delivery of public services to Indigenous peoples. More than that, we can help to develop best practices ourselves, and so become active agents of change.

III. SPECIFIC SECTORS

24. Let me turn now to some specific sectors. I will not attempt to present a "wrap-up" of issues and recommendations at this time. That will be the object of our final brief in October. For now, I will touch on just a few sectors and offer a few observations on possible "paths forward".
25. In its press release of December 14, 2017, the Commission identified some key themes from the hearings over the previous six months:

"Some major themes have emerged from the 2017 hearings. The importance of education and training have been underlined by many. Homelessness conditions, women's rights, youth protection, cultural safety and problems related to language

have also emerged from the testimonies. Finally, a lack of resources has been reported at many levels, particularly in housing, health, police, justice and correctional services, to name a few.”

A. POLICE

26. Perhaps I should start with police services, it will help us to remember why we are here. This Commission of Inquiry was established in response to a very specific problem – the allegations by some courageous Indigenous women of discrimination and mistreatment at the hands of certain police officers. A quick recap of the facts will be helpful here.
27. In October 2015, Radio-Canada’s *Enquête* reported on a number of specific allegations by Indigenous women of serious misconduct and possible criminal offences by certain officers of the Sûreté du Québec Val-d’Or detachment, including “Starlight Tours”, physical assault, provision of illegal drugs, and obtaining sexual services for consideration.
28. From the day of the *Enquête* broadcast, calls arose from Indigenous communities for an independent inquiry. Instead, at first, Quebec transferred the investigation into the allegations from the SQ to the Montreal Police Force (“SPVM”). The Government also appointed an Independent Observer, Me Fannie Lafontaine, to monitor the investigation carried out by the SPVM.
29. On November 15, 2016, the Independent Observer submitted her report, concluding that the Phase 1 investigation of the SPVM had been carried out with integrity and impartially. She also made a number of recommendations, touched on below.⁹

⁹ *Rapport de l’observatrice civile indépendante, Évaluation de l’intégrité et de l’impartialité des enquêtes du SPVM sur des allégations d’actes criminels visant des policiers de la SQ à l’encontre de femmes autochtones de Val-d’Or et d’ailleurs, Phase 1 des enquêtes.*

30. On November 18, 2016, the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions (“**DPCP**”) announced that, due to a lack of evidence, no criminal charges would be laid in 35 out of the 37 files investigated by the SPVM. The reaction among Indigenous communities was immediate: keen disappointment and anger. Indigenous organizations, including the Grand Council of the Crees, renewed calls for an independent judicial commission of inquiry.
31. In December 2016, Professors Bellot and Sylvestre released their report on the *Judicialization of Homelessness in Val-d’Or*.¹⁰ Days later, the Government of Quebec formally established this Commission of Inquiry to look into the issue of discrimination towards Indigenous people in relation to six public services, including police services.
32. In considering police services, a distinction should be made between non-Indigenous and Indigenous police forces. I will not comment on specific cases at this time, but touch on more structural issues.

1. Non-Indigenous Police

33. Professors Bellot and Sylvestre have noted a profound mismatch between the training received by non-Indigenous police officers and their work with Indigenous people in urban centres. Police officers are being asked to do work for which they have little or no training:¹¹

... the police are too often asked to be first (or only) responders to deal with the tensions and problems related to the presence of homeless people in Downtown Val d’Or. In most cases, police officers have not received any specific training on the history and realities of Quebec First Nations and Inuit prior to taking their position in Val d’Or. In certain cases, the police and homeless people entertain cordial relationships, but generally speaking, we observed misunderstanding and distrust on each side. There seems to be a profound lack of correspondence between the

¹⁰ Val-d’Or Report, *supra*, note 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

nature of the work performed by police officers, their means and methods of intervention, and the needs and problems of homeless people.

[Emphasis added]

34. We support the recommendations of Professors Bellot and Sylvestre to shift from police to social responses in dealing with homeless Indigenous persons:¹²
- a. An intervention protocol should be adopted in order to prioritize social responses including by an increase presence of street workers in particular during evenings and over nights. In the case of Indigenous people, such a protocol should be developed with Indigenous communities.
 - b. The SQ should issue clear guidelines to the officers to avoid using punitive responses and providing support to social interventions when it is deemed necessary. Such support should not lead to the issuance of a ticket.
35. The Independent Observer, Me Fanny Lafontaine, has recommended changes to police complaint and investigation procedures, to be developed with adequate representation of Indigenous persons.¹³ We support her recommendations. We can report that some discussions have taken place between representatives of certain Indigenous organizations, including the Grand Council of the Crees, and the Ministry of Public Security (“MSP”) and the Secretariat for Indigenous Affairs (“SAA”). Although further discussions are required, the exchanges to date have been positive, and we are working together towards a better model of dealing with complaints by Indigenous persons regarding police misconduct.
36. Picking up on the theme of learning from others, we suggest that there are lessons to be learned from the evidence of former Saskatoon Police Chief Clive Weighill, who shared his experience with the Commission on October 19, 2017.¹⁴ He told the Commission of the events surrounding the death in 1990 of Neil Stonechild after a “starlight tour” by two members of the Saskatoon Police Service. He referred to the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ *Supra*, note 9, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ Exhibits P-130 to P-136.

Commission of Inquiry by Mr. Justice David Wright, which inspired the creation of this Commission.

37. The Stonechild Inquiry recommended:¹⁵
- (a) Review and improvement of complaint procedures regarding police misconduct;
 - (b) Designation of an Aboriginal police officer as liaison for First Nation persons and to act as an informal ombudsman;
 - (c) Annual reports to the Minister of Justice on complaints about police officers;
 - (d) In-depth training in race relations for police officers.
38. Most important, Chief Weighill drew attention to some practical steps taken by the Saskatoon Police Service to improve its relations with First Nations communities:¹⁶
- (a) A new complaints system created with the participation of First Nations;
 - (b) Greatly strengthened cooperation and partnerships with First Nations, including the Police Chief's Advisory Committee on First Nations and Métis;
 - (c) In-depth education and training for all police officers on Indigenous history, culture, spirituality, residential schools and contemporary issues;
 - (d) Informal outreach and participation in First Nation cultural, social and sports events.
39. Many of these measures do not require legislative amendments or big budgets – they can be done quickly and at little cost. It is all about building relationships and trust. By all accounts, relations between the Saskatoon Police Service and local First Nations people have gone from toxic to something, if not perfect, then at least much, much better. Director David Bergeron of the Eeyou-Eenou Police Force (“EPPF”) stated much the same thing here on June 11 when he talked about community based policing – getting out of the police cruiser and talking to people.¹⁷

¹⁵ Exhibit P-010, p. 49.

¹⁶ Exhibit P-130.

¹⁷ Exhibit P-633.

2. Indigenous Police Forces

40. The other side of the police coin, so to speak, is Indigenous police forces. Commissioner Viens, you addressed, in your third call for action on March 23, 2018, the need for stable, secure funding for Indigenous police forces as an essential service to their communities. I wish to thank you for your support on this critical point, and I would ask that the Commission monitor the progress made in current discussions so as to ensure proper funding for Indigenous police forces in the future.
41. Director David Bergeron has drawn attention to challenges faced by the EEPF and other Indigenous police forces in recruiting Indigenous police officers. In part, the difficulties relate to the criteria for admission to the École nationale de police du Québec (“ENPQ”) in Nicolet as well as the language of instruction and course materials. Some adjustments are required to adapt these criteria and processes to the reality of the Cree communities. We have good working relations with the MSP, and we look forward to working with them and the ENPQ to identify solutions to these challenges.

B. ATTACKING A ROOT PROBLEM – HOUSING

42. It has become increasingly clear that housing is the hidden iceberg lurking below many of the issues brought before this Commission. The evidence presented to the over the past year validates these preliminary observations in our Initial Brief of last June:¹⁸

157. Desperately overcrowded and substandard housing in Indigenous communities, in some cases similar to third world conditions, lies at the heart of the web of social and health issues plaguing Indigenous communities. Overcrowded housing hinders success in school. It creates tension within the family. It breeds conditions ripe for physical and emotional abuse. In so doing, it effectively drives

¹⁸ *Initial Brief of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) / Cree Nation Government to the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services in Quebec: Listening, Reconciliation and Progress*, June 14, 2017, Exhibit P-010, pp. 36-37.

many Indigenous persons to “escape” to urban centres, only to find themselves, at times, homeless and living in the street, prey to violence and abuse.

158. Until the housing shortage in Indigenous communities is addressed through concrete action, other actions will come to nothing. Until Indigenous people are no longer living 10, 12 and 20 to a single house, conditions commonly encountered in Northern Quebec, they will continue to fall victim to violence and abuse both in and outside their communities.

159. Until this single issue is resolved, Indigenous people will continue to be driven from their communities to urban centres, where some will become marginalized. The deployment of more social workers and shelter beds in the cities are, at best, a band aid solution. These measures may perhaps reduce some distress on the margin, but they will not solve the real problem.

43. Bill Namagoose will tell the story of the Cree struggle over the past 50 years to win recognition of our rights and a good life for our people. The Cree have had some success in improving our living conditions.
44. I can speak to this from personal experience. Fifty years ago, my own community of Ouje Bougoumou was dispersed, living in tarpaper shacks by the side of the road, seen as “squatters” on our own land. I look at our community now, and I have to pinch myself to believe my eyes. Years of hard work based on our treaty rights under the JBNQA, dogged perseverance in the face of government indifference or hostility, and our refusal to take no for an answer allowed us to build a beautiful community. But this experience is more the exception than the rule.
45. And much remains to be done in the Cree communities. There are still far too many Cree without decent housing. On even the most favourable estimate, the backlog of housing in the Cree communities is well over 1,000 units, and it is projected to more than double over the next ten years. The number of multiple families per house is about 20 times the Quebec average, and the number of multiple persons per room, about four times the Quebec average. Like other Indigenous peoples, the Cree are

living with the sick homes, health problems and social distress caused by overcrowded housing.

46. That is why housing became a key election issue for the Cree in last year's election for Grand Chief. I pledged then to make access for all Cree to decent, affordable housing a top priority of the Cree Nation Government. In this regard, it should be pointed out that the Cree do not expect others to do all the heavy lifting. We are more than willing to propose solutions and to do our share. We are now working hard to develop our own innovative Cree Nation Housing Strategy.
47. The Strategy has two goals: to secure affordable housing for all Cree and to promote private home ownership. The strategy will, among other things:
 - (a) Propose an innovative approach, based on partnerships between the Cree and Government as well as the private sector;
 - (b) Entail a commitment by the Cree Nation Government of significant Cree resources, to be complemented by commitments by Government;
 - (c) Address all sectors of the housing market, with a cornerstone being the prioritization of private homeownership for those Cree who can afford it;
 - (d) Address the social welfare requirements of those who require government support as well as the special needs of the Cree elders and youth.
48. We have secured the approval of the relevant Cree authorities to allocate significant resources as a special Housing Fund to implement the Cree Nation Housing Strategy. We are undertaking discussions with Canada on ways and means to implement the Cree Nation Housing Strategy. And we hope and expect that Quebec will join us as partners in finally coming to grips with the problem of overcrowded housing in the Cree communities. It should be noted that implementation of the Cree Nation Housing Strategy will create significant economic benefits in terms of contracts and jobs for the entire region of Eeyou Istchee James Bay.

C. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

49. This leads me to the broader question of socio-economic development of Indigenous communities. Meaningful work and a decent income are essential to any person's self-respect. Socio-economic development is part of the solution to the social distress of many Indigenous communities. So it became another top priority in my election platform last year. The Cree Nation has many talented, hard-working business people and workers. Large numbers of young Cree enter the job market every year. We must create the conditions to permit our contractors and workers to thrive if our communities are to enjoy a vibrant future. With this in mind, we are developing measures to support local Cree businesses. These measures include the following:
- (a) Negotiation with Quebec of implementation of the provisions of the JBNQA dealing with priority Cree contracting and employment;
 - (b) Support for small/medium local businesses to contribute employment to a strong and diversified Cree economy;
 - (c) Adapting the CCQ regime in Eeyou Istchee so that certification in the construction trades corresponds to Cree reality.
50. We are also working to develop, in consultation with the Cree First Nations and Cree organizations, a Cree Nation Social Development Plan to ensure the wellness of all our members. This Plan, which is still under development, will bring together the Cree organizations to coordinate their resources and efforts. The Plan will define the principles and objectives of Cree social development, including access to quality education, health and social services, training, housing, and jobs. The Plan will identify some of the main challenges to social development and, most important, it will propose solutions in order to achieve our objectives.

D. EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

51. Education and capacity building should be seen as key tools in combating social distress in Indigenous communities. That is why, I have devoted much effort over the years to education and capacity building for our Cree youth. We want Cree youth to live and work in our communities. We do not want them to be forced to go south in order to build their lives. So far, we have been quite successful in retaining our youth. The JBNQA and later agreements have created many opportunities for Cree youth, but they must know what the opportunities are and what skills they need to seize the opportunities.
52. The Cree Nation Government is now developing the Cree Jobs Initiative to support our Cree youth in internships, apprenticeships and new job placement opportunities in the public and private sectors. We are working with the Cree School Board and other Cree partners to encourage our youth to complete their studies and develop their skills to have them fill positions in all sectors of employment, whether professional, administrative, technical or skilled labour. We are also developing transition measures for Post-Secondary graduates so they can access employment in Cree organizations in their area of studies.

E. CREE HUNTERS AND TRAPPERS

53. We should enlist the support, not just of institutions, but of knowledgeable individuals in seeking solutions to some of the issues before this Commission. In our view, Cree hunters and trappers can make a valuable contribution to this effort. They are among our most important guardians of Cree culture, traditions and language. They occupy the land for the Cree Nation, and they transmit our culture to our youth. Time spent by our youth with Cree hunters and trappers on the land can be a source of healing. We must find ways to ensure traditional Cree hunting, fishing and trapping remains a viable way of life for our youth and for future

generations. This was part of the vision of the JBNQA treaty, and it is a vision that we must guard jealously.

F. TRADITIONAL CREE CULTURE

54. More generally, traditional Cree culture is another part of the solution to the challenges before this Commission. The Cree Health Board and the Cree School Board have recognized this by making a central place for traditional Cree culture and healing in their operations. The Cree Health Board has created the Nishiyuu Miyupimaatisiun Department with the vision of transforming the way of life, health and wellness of Cree individuals, family and communities, inspired by traditional knowledge and culture, for the miyupimaatisiun (well-being) of the Eeyou Nation. The Cree Health Board is also seeking legislative recognition for traditional Cree healing practices.
55. The work carried out by the Customary Adoption Working Group is consistent with this vision. James Bobbish spoke to this effort here yesterday in the context of Bill 113, which will clarify the legal effects of Cree customary adoption. We believe that traditional, family-based approaches, such as Cree customary adoption, can reduce the need to turn to more institutional approaches, such as youth protection services. It is therefore appropriate that public resources be allocated to support the implementation of customary adoption processes in the Indigenous communities.

IV. CONCLUSION

56. I hope that these observations and suggestions will assist the Commission in your important work to prevent and eliminate discrimination in the delivery of public services to the Indigenous peoples of Quebec. I reiterate the commitment of the Cree Nation to support the Commission in this vital mission. I thank you, Commissioner

Viens, for your attention, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues in the months to come.

* * * * *