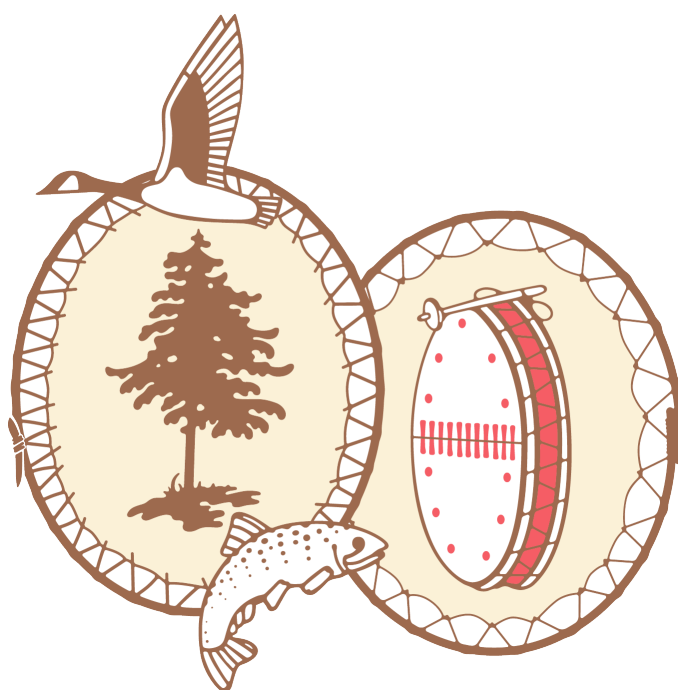


Signing of a Grand Alliance between the Government of Quebec and the Cree Nation



Speaking Notes
Grand Chief Dr. Abel Bosum

Monday, February 17, 2020

[Open in Cree]

Good morning, bonjour. Premier Legault, Ministers, Mr. Secretary General, Deputy Ministers, Chiefs, Mayors, and other distinguished guests; I would like to thank you all for being here for this special day. Merci d'être ici avec nous en cette grande journée.

There is an important reason why today is a special day: It is because we, the Chiefs and leaders of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee,... "**choose**"...to be here.

We are here today, not to make a sacrifice, or surrender. Today, is not a part of some concession, or difficult compromise. We were not forced to be here as part of a settlement.

The right and the ability of a people to "**choose**" is a fundamental human right that unfortunately we tend to take for granted, or we only wake up to defend it when bulldozers and barricades are already dividing us.

The Memorandum of Understanding that we sign today calls for the Cree Nation Government and the Government of Quebec to work together to design and develop an estimated 4.7-billion-dollar comprehensive program in transportation infrastructure that will shape and secure the future of Northern Quebec for generations to come.

The vision for this major infrastructure program has come from us, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee. It represents our own vision of what sustainable economic development should be in Eeyou Istchee and Northern Quebec. We have been working hard with the Government of Quebec to refine it, which brings us to the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding today. The Cree Nation Government **“chooses”**, and I would like to emphasize the word **“chooses”**, to allocate our resources and our expertise towards this endeavour.

As a people who are defined by our close connection to the land, which has sustained us for thousands of years, a people who are connected spiritually to the animals that give us strength, we know when development is sustainable. We look forward to demonstrating through our skills, expertise, values, and commitment to future generations, that we can determine how to pursue development in a way that protects the land and the wildlife.

We are targeting transportation infrastructure that will have a direct impact on the viability of natural resource development in our region. Our region is rich in critical mineral resources, in particular, lithium and vanadium. We have an extraordinary opportunity to stimulate responsible development, not just in Quebec and Canada, but far beyond our borders. These metals are very important to the electrification of the world and the move away from energy that contributes to climate change.

The transportation infrastructure program that we will define together will include:

- More than 700 kms of new rail;
- A deep seaport so businesses can access new markets more effectively;
- Thousands of kms of new or upgraded roads which will make life easier for community members and developers;
- Hundreds of kilometers of new power lines to deliver affordable and renewable energy to developers and communities;
- The formation of a strategic alliance to ensure that, when valuable critical metal resources are mined in Eeyou Istchee, the maximum value and benefit stay in the Quebec through their processing here, adding to our economic capacity, diversity, and strength;

“AND”....probably the most important “AND” you will hear all day;

- The development of a network of protected areas that are designed not as an afterthought, not as a concession, but as a determining factor in development. We will demonstrate that it is possible to design development infrastructure in a way to protect the land;
- Finally, the development of local capacity for the management of these protected areas and wildlife. This critical management capacity to care for the land, wildlife and especially endangered species, such as the woodland caribou, will contribute to our credibility as responsible governments and ensure social acceptability for our development plans.

To understand why we are confident that we will be able to achieve these things in a spirit of mutual respect and partnership with Quebec, it is important that we not forget where we have come from.

In 2002, through the *Paix des Braves* Agreement, Premier Bernard Landry invested in the Cree Nation by providing the financial resources necessary to implement community development. This community development was promised in the 1975 *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*. There are many Chiefs here today who have taken those resources and built communities that they are proud of. This represents a clear break from the past colonial and paternalistic government policies that kept our communities economically underdeveloped.

In 2008, through the *New Relationship Agreement* with Canada, the Federal Government also provided financial resources to give our communities the opportunity to develop in their own image. This Agreement contributed enormously to the capacity of all communities to unite, and year after year, create a Cree Nation capital plan.

In 2012 we signed with Quebec the *Agreement on Governance in the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory*. Under this unique and historical Agreement, the Cree Nation was entrusted to jointly manage municipal government and land-use planning with our neighboring mayors, the Jamesians. This is very challenging work where our neighboring mayors, and the Cree Chiefs, have to find innovative ways to communicate with one another, to bridge the gaps that come from having very different experiences.

All of these Agreements have added to our growth and our capacity as a modern-day Indigenous Government.

Agreements are investments. This is why today in 2020, I can stand here and offer Premier Francois Legault, and all of Quebec, a return on the investment made by Quebec so many years ago through the *Paix des Braves Agreement*.

The Cree Nation, as full partners, will contribute to the economic future and stability of Quebec.

Unfortunately, not all First Nations have this opportunity. I would like to take a moment to speak to the Wet'suwet'en Nation, and all other Nations, that stand with me in supporting them during these very difficult times.

History has demonstrated time and time again that nothing good comes from forcing development on First Nations or displacing First Nations for development.

To those of you on both sides of the barricade, I pray for your safety and I pray that leaders in your region learn soon that strong First Nations, skilled First Nations, First Nations with the capacity to participate in the determination of acceptable development, is a necessary condition to the success of all people.

Strong First Nations are not your enemy, they are your most important ally.

As the Federal Government searches for solutions to difficult Indigenous relations provoked by non-inclusive approaches to development, I hope that we, the Cree and Quebec, can offer an alternative approach. As a nation, we have come very far in our relations with the Governments of Quebec and Canada, and I believe we can achieve much more together.

In closing, I would like to give special thanks to Premier Legault. I knew when I first met you as Premier of Quebec, that you were not a typical politician. You were a leader who clearly wanted to do things, make real changes and forge new roads and partnerships.

The content of this ambitious Memorandum of Understanding is a direct result of the work that we have been doing over the past year, in close collaboration, with;

- Minister Jonatan Julien of Natural Resources and Energy,
- Minister François Bonnardel of Transport,
- Minister Fitzgibbon of the Economy,
- Minister Benoit Charette of Environment,
- Minister Pierre Dufour of Forests and Wildlife, and
- Minister Sylvie D'Amours of Indigenous Affairs.

I would like to thank these Ministers and their staff. I would also like to thank Secretary General Yves Ouellet with his dedicated team of Deputy Ministers.

Mr. Legault, we are taking an important step today. We have already gone well beyond just laying down arms, to make peace. We are forming a true alliance, a Grand Alliance. I look forward to building a legacy of this Grand Alliance for generations to come.
