



Kahnawake - November 20, 2008

Subject: Reaction to the Speech from the Throne

Quebec Native Women is disappointed with the Speech from the Throne that only briefly mentioned Aboriginal peoples during the opening of the 40th Parliamentary session.

Despite the Government of Canada's apology for the Residential School experience, the Speech from the throne failed to mention any plans to forge a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Instead the Speech from the Throne is a clear indication that the status quo will be maintained by government leaving Aboriginal peoples with insufficient means and resources to continue our efforts in rebuilding our nations devastated by colonization and the Residential School system.

There is no doubt that stabilizing the current international financial crisis is a priority for the government. However, the financial reality is that extreme cut backs in education, health and economic development means that Aboriginal peoples will never be able to attain the same quality of life enjoyed by others living in Canada. We must remind Canadians that in their quality of life index, the United Nations listed Canada as 148th when it included the realities lived by Aboriginal peoples.

Extreme cuts in education have meant that since 2001, 13,300 Aboriginal students have not had access to post-secondary education. During the Council of Federation's meeting in Quebec City in July 2008, the main priority for the First Ministers was improving the access to education for Aboriginal youth. The current Government policy must change in order to support Aboriginal peoples who desire to improve their chances of having a better life.

We congratulate the Government on its announcement to invest funds for research on energy efficient methods for the consumer. However, it is unfortunate that the target 20 % reduction of greenhouse gases by 2020 will still not be sufficient to adequately ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the quality of life that this generation enjoys. More must be done to make environmentally friendly technologies affordable to the consumer. The issue of energy security remains problematic due to the longstanding historical grievances that Aboriginal peoples have had in regards to the use of our lands and resources. As well, care must be given to the generalized acceptance that nuclear power is clean energy. Time and again, it has been proven that the waste products of this energy have yet to be dealt with in a responsible manner by Government.

The issue of trade expansion and the security of Canadian energy is also of great concern regarding the long-term sustainability of Aboriginal communities given the Government's past history on these issues. The common practice of the Government has been to displace Aboriginal communities in order to protect the interest of corporations. It raises important questions and concerns regarding the exploitation of natural resources upon the lands of Aboriginal peoples that have not been ceded to Canada.

It is therefore recommended that the current legislation dealing with land claims undergoes urgent changes to accommodate the needs of Aboriginal peoples so that they may have access to their lands and resources. Much of the proposed areas of development include unceded Aboriginal territories that will force the elimination of the way of life, custom, culture and language of Indigenous peoples.

Respectfully

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President

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