



Wachiya, Kwey, Bonjour, good evening.

May I first of all congratulate the organizers of this event for their enthusiasm and hard work in making this event happen and my congratulations also to those who have begun to work on the very special initiative which is being presented over these two days.

I must tell you that I was very excited and honoured to have been asked to be a speaker at this important gathering. This particular topic touches on some of the most key and critical issues facing the Cree Nation, and these are issues which have been close to my heart for a number of years. What is at stake in these kinds of discussions that you will be having today and tomorrow is the future direction and the future success of the Cree Nation in our collective efforts to fulfill our long-held vision of what our young Indigenous nation can become. The way in which these issues are tackled will determine whether we will, in fact, realize the potential of our Nation to become genuine "masters of our own destiny" and "masters of our own home". It will be in how we deal with the fundamental issues of educational policies, educational curriculum, and the educational programs and services of our Cree Nation which will really be the test of our success in reversing our colonial past and moving toward a post-colonial reality which has the Cree Nation at its center and which has the future well-being of our people

as its focus. It is the way in which we orient all of our Cree entities that have a role to play in the education of our youth and young adults that will be the ultimate test of our efforts to play the central and key role in the economic, political, cultural and administrative life of Eeyou Istchee. We will not be able to play that central role unless we are armed with the skills, the knowledge and the capacity to exercise our authority in the areas of governance, economic development, education, health, environmental protection, and all the other sectors of the life of our Territory.

It was precisely for these reasons, that beginning in 2012, I, together with our former Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, began to sound the alarm bell. We had just successfully negotiated our *Governance Agreement* with Quebec and we were finalizing the outstanding governance issues related to our *New Relationship Agreement* with Canada, when we realized that we were close to putting into place all the essential elements—all the jurisdictions, the authorities, the processes and the financial capacity—to become an effective Indigenous Nation. Of course, that reality has become even more reinforced with the passage of our new *Governance Agreement* with Canada that provides for our own constitution and provides for an enhanced role for our local governments and our Cree Nation Government. All the structural components were coming into being so that the visions of our past leaders—both those who were elected and those who we have always respected—

could be realized. What we understood was that the absolute key to the future success of our journey of translating the very hard fought victories in securing recognition of our Indigenous rights into tangible benefits for our people was the capacity of the next generation to bring life to our agreements, to develop the skills to take on the challenges of Indigenous nation-building, and to truly exercise meaningful control over what happens within our traditional Territory.

It was this understanding that prompted us, in 2013, to establish the first Capacity-Building Roundtable which was held in Ottawa. This event focused on providing to our Post-Secondary students at the time a history of the Cree Nation over the previous four decades so that they could understand the struggles that our Nation has gone through in order to achieve the things we have achieved, and more importantly, for them to gain a deep understanding of our current reality and what was being asked of them. We were asking them to take on a very special challenge that we presented to their generation so that they could continue to build on the successes to date and to make a contribution to the further building of the Cree Nation. We asked them to continue the journey with the same pioneering sense of purpose and determination that has brought us to where we are today. We emphasized to them that it was their generation's unique challenge to acquire the skills and the knowledge that would give life to the rights that

we had worked and struggled so hard to have recognized. All of our previous Cree leadership signed on to this initiative and have actively participated in bringing the message to our youth. We have all understood the critical nature of the turning-point that we now find ourselves in. We have all understood how vital the capacity-building agenda is for the future of our Nation.

That initiative begun in 2013 has continued. We realized that it was vital that all of our Cree youth understand the challenges we were placing before them and that it would be important for us to do all that we could to inspire and encourage our youth to take on this challenge. So, we decided to bring the Capacity-Building Roundtable to the youth in all our communities and we have continued to develop further initiatives that are in keeping with the spirit of our original Capacity-Building Roundtable. The Roundtable remains an ongoing initiative.

I was excited to see that our message has hit home with a number of our Cree entities who have also taken on the challenge of making their work consistent with the priority of capacity-building. And I am very pleased to see that the Cree Nation of Chisasibi in collaboration with the Secretariat to the Cree Nation Abitibi-Temiscamingue Economic Alliance have mounted this

event to discuss the future potential of a future Post-Secondary Institution in Eeyou Istchee. This also is in keeping with our vision for the future.

If our various initiatives in the area of capacity-building are to be successful, and if we are to hit the mark in providing for the development of appropriate training and educational opportunities for our youth, we must acknowledge and embrace our own diversity within the Cree Nation. We must embrace the fact that some of our people are inclined to continue to pursue our traditional pursuits as a way of life; we must embrace the fact that some of our people will be inclined to pursue administrative careers within our various Cree entities; we must embrace that some of our people will be exploring new and different ways of relying on the land to provide for their sustenance, for example, in resource development activities; and we must embrace the fact that some of our youth will want to pursue careers in the professions that require higher education. By acknowledging and by embracing all of these realities, we will then be in a position to structure our educational policies and orient our educational institutions to provide capacity-building opportunities that address the needs of all of our people and provide support for our people to pursue any of the diverse opportunities before them.

So, I welcome the discussions related to the creation of a Post-Secondary Institution in Eeyou Istchee as it could potentially contribute to the widening of opportunities for the effective development of skills, education and capacities that reflect the realities of our people and that also, at the same time, reflects the realities of the opportunities for the Cree Nation to fulfill its profound vision for its future.

I would also like to suggest that as our Cree entities, and other associated entities, make efforts to orient their programs and services to enhance the capacity-building opportunities for our youth and young adults, we keep in mind the importance of certain commonalities in our approaches. Let us remain mindful of why we are mounting these initiatives and why we are doing these things. The commonalities that I would suggest we keep uppermost in our minds is that we are, as a Cree Nation, on a journey to decolonize all aspects of our lives as Cree people; we are on a journey to reinstate the central role of our people within Eeyou Istchee; we are on a journey to re-empower and re-enable our people to control all the essential aspects of our lives; we are on a journey to recreate our original sovereignty to the greatest extent possible; and we are on a journey to create an Indigenous Nation that reflects our historic role within our traditional Territory.

Yes, it is true “Build it and they will come”, but they will come with enthusiasm, with passion and with purpose only if we build it the right way. We need to build our institutions and we need to develop our initiatives based on a solid foundation. We need to build our capacity-building efforts on the vision of our Cree Nation of building an effective and meaningful post-colonial reality in which our people and our communities can grow and thrive. Our challenge is now to lay the solid foundation for that to happen.

I know from my personal experience in my own family that if we inspire our youth, they will rise to the occasion. If we support our youth, they will understand the importance of our message. If we are bold and innovative in addressing their realities, they will dedicate themselves to our vision and to our journey. So, in addition to “build it and they will come”, I would like to suggest also that “if we inspire them, they will rise up”.

My late son, Nathaniel, was proof of this. He attended the first Capacity-Building Roundtable in Ottawa and he was both inspired by it and understood what was being asked of him. This initiative played a crucial role in guiding his own future. Nathaniel was an exceptional young person who, over the course of his short life, demonstrated what the successive leadership of the Cree Nation has been asking of its youth.



As some of you may know, Nathaniel was a passionate person, both in his personal life and in his professional life. In his personal life, he was an accomplished motocross and snowmobile racer and experienced many successes and achieved considerable recognition throughout Canada and the U.S. In his work life, Nathaniel was a daring young innovator and entrepreneur. He had recently established his own firm focused on enhancing the capacity-building efforts of his Cree Nation. His firm coordinated training courses focused on the mining industry to ensure that qualified Cree people could competently take on the jobs available in the numerous mines within the traditional territory of our people.

In his short life, Nathaniel achieved his own greatness. He was a solid and respected role model for the youth of his community and for the Cree Nation. He demonstrated to the youth that it is possible to pursue a passion while, at the same time, making a substantial contribution to the development of his people. He showed through his life that it is possible to be passionate about a sport and be equally passionate about making the world a better place for the people around us. He genuinely took to heart what the Cree leadership has been telling our youth, and he acted on it.

In his short life, Nathaniel left us all a huge legacy—he was a model of dignity, passion and professionalism. He was serious, yet knew how to have

fun. He excelled in everything he undertook, yet he was modest and humble. He brought to a contemporary Cree world the values and principles inherent in our Cree culture, and in that way, Nathaniel was really a trailblazer for our future. He showed what it could look like to express our Cree values and traditions in a contemporary world.

For me, personally, in my own work going forward, I pledge to continue the work of the Capacity-Building Roundtable because I know it works and I know it is what must be done. Nathaniel understood the message and responded to the call. Both as a parent, and as your Grand Chief, there can be no more fitting a tribute that I could give in honour of Nathaniel's memory than to promote the example he has set for Cree youth, and to continue to promote the capacity-building agenda of the Cree Nation that Nathaniel wholeheartedly embraced and expressed in his life.

As proficient as he was becoming in dealing with a wide range of issues related to the contemporary economy around us, and which we are part of, he also loved our traditional way of life and pursued it whenever he could. He embraced our Cree way of life in the same way he did everything—with passion.

Nathaniel left us with a gift. He gave us all a glimpse of what the future of the Cree Nation can look like—a future built on dedication to achieving a goal, hard work, confidence and optimism, and in the knowledge that there is no vision, no dream and no aspiration that cannot be achieved. His life will continue to inspire me knowing that we are on the right track and knowing that capacity-building must continue to be of the highest priority for the Cree Nation.

I wish you well in your continuing discussions tomorrow and I am fully confident that your discussions will be productive, fruitful and will take us to where we need to be.

Miigwetch.