



INQUIRY RESPECTING THE TREATMENT, EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF INNU IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

English Transcript

Volume 1

*Commissioners: Retired Judge James Igloliorte, Dr. Mike Devine and
Anastasia Qupee*

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P. RALPH: Welcome Commissioners, Innu Leadership, Elders.

We're – to start us off today, we are pleased to welcome Sheshatshiu Innu leader, Tshaukuesh Penashue, who will open this session with a prayer.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I was going to say – I was going to say just a short – and my English is not very good. I wish – I wish I had to speak English very good.

I want to say just a short – like her job, [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken] she's going to start something. I'm very happy. I'm very, very happy in my heart. This is first time it's going to happen, this job.

I hope it's going to work. Always, always – always, always when I think I'm going to say something short. Before I go in my house I just get practice, practice; we say so many times.

For a long time, Innu have suffered.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA (providing English translation): I hope this Inquiry will go as it is being planned. And I would like to thank the Commissioners for taking their time to help us with what we'll be going through.

P. RALPH: Thank you, Elder Tshaukuesh Penashue, for that beautiful prayer and your thoughts. Your words will help us – guide us forward in this important work during this Inquiry.

We'd now like to give the Commissioners an opportunity to make opening statements. I'm – Commissioner Igloliorte, I'm not sure the order, but I'm assuming it's – go ahead.

And again, I'd remind you to go as slow as possible to allow the translators to translate.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you so much for being here.

Respected leaders, thank you for being part of our opening sessions and ceremonies for the Inquiry.

Sixty years ago, I came to the hospital on the other side of the river. I was 13 years old. At the same time, in the hospital, was [Innu-aimun spoken] Jack's brother. He was the first Innu boy I had ever met. At that time, the other side of the river was the IGA hospital and it was a healing place for all of Labrador. But I think we can – we can see in 60 years that the healing place is now on this side of the river.

All the work that has been done here, all the meetings that you've had over the years, the preparation you have done in starting to heal your community is showing us that Innu are capable and should be handling their own affairs.

This Inquiry is designed by the parties; that is, the Governments of Canada, the Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Innu governance.

P. RALPH: Jim, I hate to interrupt but Gerry needs more time.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

P. RALPH: He needs to collect his thoughts and so I think that you need to say a sentence or two and then wait for a brief time? And maybe we can get someone to signal for Jim when he can go again? Someone (inaudible) something that's Mushuau –

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah.

P. RALPH: – translation?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Good.

We recognize that the Innu have started their own path of healing. The Innu themselves and the governments recognize that the care of children should belong to your community. Our job, as Commissioners, is to help you along that path.

One important part of our job has been to make sure that we work with the people of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. So before we even come into the community we have to let people know that we will be respectful and take our time so that people get to know who we are. That has been an important part of our work and I thank all of the people who are working with the Commission from your communities and have done such a good job.

The second part, which we find very important, is to provide good healing facilities and good people to help in this difficult period. All of the existing healing services in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu have taken 50 years to build and you have done a fabulous job. You have had 50 years to get ready. We have had five months to get ready. So I'm very proud of our healing services lead and all of the Inquiry healing services people for the job they have done. I would ask them, please, if they would stand for one moment.

Thank you very much.

We have our Elders and we have our leaders here, and we are very grateful for the role that they are playing in this Inquiry. Because we will be examining many difficult issues involving the law, we should recognize that for the Government of Canada and for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, for the Innu Nation, for the families, for the Inquiry, we have these dedicated, educated professionals to help us. And I will ask them – our lawyers, their lawyers – to please stand and – so you can see who they are.

Thank you very much.

You will continue to see all of these people over the many hearings we will be having in your two communities. I wish to say thank you to Eastern Audio for providing exceptional service for recordings and for – and to preserve what you are telling us as part of your history.

We understand that what we have to do today and until this Inquiry is done, must be the Innu way. We must respect your language, your culture and your strength. In many – in many parts of the way you govern yourself, you have already proved that you are capable of doing a good job, and with your help, with the help of all the parties, we want to make sure this continues.

After today we'll – we will be told the history of the communities. We will begin to hear that on Friday of this week and that will continue for both communities into next week. Later on, as time goes on, we will be hearing from individuals and families. We understand that this will be a difficult period and process for all of you. But your job of taking over child protection is much harder than our job. It will not take months; it will take years. But you have told us we must start somewhere and this is how we are beginning.

We want to show you that we have our tea dolls up front here, and we will be using them for the entirety of the Inquiry. It reminds us who we are working for, and that is a serious responsibility. You have always had the right way of raising your children and we must be sure that you continue that responsibility as you have always done.

I will now offer Anastasia and Mike a chance to give their opening remarks.

Tshenashkumitin.

P. RALPH: Yup.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Okay.

I'm going to speak in my language, so if people would put on their headsets ...?

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Can't hear him?

Okay.

INTERPRETER NUNA: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And then you translate –

INTERPRETER NUNA: Okay.

My name is Anastasia and I have three kids and two grandchildren.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Good.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

INTERPRETER NUNA: I would like to welcome the Elders and leaders for being here.

It has been six years that we have waited for this Inquiry to start and we have waited long enough to – we were in Toronto – with the leaders – Eugene Hart, John and Simeon.

When we were there we were talking about that we need to work together for the sake of the children and the – and the families who have lost their loved ones through the system.

And that's where it started. It was a round table and we were talking about the effects of the child protection system in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

And it was said that there should be an Innu take part in the Inquiry – in the Commissioners, and that was requested, to work with the other Commissioners, and then they asked me to work with these other Commissioners.

So Judge Igloliorte is leading this Inquiry and so – and also Mike Devine is there with us; and there are three of us here. We are – also ask to work this independently; not to have government to be here with us too, but only work on their behalf.

It is the first time that the Innu – to have this Inquiry to find out about the child protection system. We see that in our communities, what child protection – what child protection system has done to us. We see it in our children.

And this is how the Inquiry will work. We are here to listen to the people who will testify, just like Judge Igloliorte said, because this is – this will be a start to work on our healing.

It has been hard work doing this work, to work for our people and those who work with us – and there will be many people who will talk. And there will be lawyers for the families, who will speak on their behalf. And it will be hard to listen to those who were affected by the child protection system.

We knew this, what the government has done, and today we will start on our journey to help ourselves, and we will listen to others speak this week.

As you can see in the – in the schedule, we will listen to Elders talk regarding the child protection system.

We are all coming from what our parents, grandparents told us; how hard it was here, to be here. I always heard my mother say: I wish I could speak English. Because she saw and knew what child protection did to her family. That is where we get our information, the things that we will work on through this Inquiry.

We are – we have started controlling our own education – and support – support income programs that we have here in our community. We will take what government has offered us and we will work on it for our

own communities, in our own way, because a lot of things have us broken in our lives. So we will try to work with each other, to have the strength to help, because everyone here has a role – in through the – the healing system– and I would like to thank the people who work at the IRT and their workers who are helping out, and for their support.

And I thank you for coming – and to tell you what our role is.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: We welcome you and we thank you for allowing us to have these hearings in your community on Innu land.

I have learned a lot since I began working on this Inquiry, and I – and I know that I have so much more to learn. We may make mistakes along the way, but we are here to listen, to learn, and when we stumble, we rely on the Innu to steer us in the right way. I think most people in – that are here today, have familiarity with my co-Commissioners Qupee and Igloliorte. So as the least-known person here, I want to share with you something about myself.

I grew up in a small rural community about 90 kilometres from St. John's. I am the middle of seven children – the middle child that is – and my father was a fisherman. I grew up in the Irish Catholic tradition in that area.

My wife and I like to say that we have six children and six grandchildren between us; four grandchildren in Alberta and four at home.

One more thing about myself growing up is that my grandparents lived with me when I was growing up.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You lived with your grandparents.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: It's really hard to talk this slow, especially for an Irishman.

Part of our Terms of Reference is that we do no further harm. We know – we know that telling your stories will be hard, but we hope that it will lead to healing.

We know that you, your parents and grandparents have been affected in one way or another by the child protection system. So this Inquiry is not just about child protection, but is about your community as a whole.

Part of the healing process for the Inquiry, in supporting you as you tell your story, is the healing services that we have in place both during the Inquiry and after for those who will need that help. We hope that throughout the Inquiry we will educate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – settlers like me – about the serious harms that the colonial Governments of Newfoundland and Canada have inflicted on the Innu.

We see the Inquiry as one of many steps that – that need to be taken on the path to reconciliation. In our work thus far with the – at the Inquiry, we have been quite impressed with the services that you already have put in place. The service – the prevention services that you have – that you have decided and you have guided and implemented in your communities are a good path for the future.

You won't be hearing too much from us Commissioners throughout these hearings, for we are here to listen. And not just to listen, but to hear you and what you have to say about the child protection system and your experiences.

P. RALPH: The vests.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Hmm?

P. RALPH: The vests.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: The vests?

P. RALPH: Yeah, mention the vests.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

The – throughout the Inquiry, I mentioned – before the Inquiry, I mentioned the healing support services. I also wanted to mention that these are the folks that you will see in the blue vests, the people that are sitting at the back there this morning.

So I look forward, as we continue with this Inquiry – with your Inquiry – that we'll have a good outcome as you take over child welfare and as you continue on the healing path for your community.

Thank you.

P. RALPH: Thank you, Commissioner Devine.

And we now invite Mushuau Elder, Joachim Nui, to drum for us.

CHIEF NUI: That's good.

P. RALPH: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

CHIEF NUI: Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

Okay. Before my father begins, I would like to introduce him; what he does, and where he came from and just to show you – for those without – who don't know him. The majority of people from here in Sheshatshiu knows what my father does.

Well originally his family are from here. He has two brothers and five sisters, I think. The majority of them have passed on and there's only three of them that still lives here. But I wants to go back to when all his

family moved to Sheshatshiu; he used to travel to Sheshatshiu and to Snegamook on – with his family. But when his father decide – when his parents decided to go back to Sheshatshiu he decided to stay home because at that time he was married to my mother and decided to stay with them.

And that's how we – I guess, the Nui family – was in Natuashish. There was only a small number of us back in the day. So that's how my father was – you know – there was only him and my late brother.

My father is 89 years old and there is five boys and two girls and he has a number of adopted kids. So he knows that – you know – I guess looking after the children from other families. But not in the way that this system that has been looking after the other kids. It's different nowadays. It seems like the CSSD is taking over the – the grandparents' duty as caretaker. That's how I look at it, because he was there and the grandparents are supposed to look after the young kids – you know, just to, I guess – to keep them busy and so on.

So before I say anything about his – what he's going to say – I like to – you know – introduce you to my father. You know, he's very respected, and known all over the – I guess – coast of Labrador. Every time I meet some people from the coast they always say: How's your father doing? Is he still walking around? Like a teenager, I said.

But I'll leave that here and I'll get my father to say a few words and I'll translate it for you best I can.

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

CHIEF NUI (providing English translation): Okay.

That was long, but I'll try.

He said, about the drum – you know – back in the day before – before anybody can

touch the drum – you know they – you know they have to – I guess – he's got to get permission from the father. And before, he is not allowed to touch any of the drumming or singing until his father is – I guess – tell the rest.

Okay. Before he starts playing the drum, he said, he had a dream, about the drum itself. That's what the Elders did in the past, you know, they dream about the drums before they can take over the – you know – the singing.

In his dream, there was an Elder that came forward with him – with the drum. And that's when he decided to make his own drum and start playing the – you know – that's where his – most of his songs came from, in his dream.

Okay. Back in – in the – in their, I guess, in their generation, the drum is a very sacred piece – item that needs to be respected. It's not to be used as a – to make – I guess, play around with, and now these days, it seems like everybody is making up, kind of, how to play the drum. That's how he sees it and most of the – most of the people that play the drum are now gone. And there's – nobody seems to be around to – taking their place, which is very, very important.

Okay. He said most of his peers that were growing up with him back in the day, now all have passed on and there's nobody else here to take over. So he says he's the only one left of all his – all of his friends that went hunting with him back in the day are gone and – and he's the only one left in this community.

Okay. He also said that – you know – back in the day, when there was no schools, no buildings to go to, he got most of his – all of us at that time were – got our teachings from our parents. Him, as a – you know – he was taught to hunt and do all of the things that men does, from his father.

Same thing with the females – you know they – they each watch their parents do things. That's how they learned. It's not that – it's not that they go to school here and doing the – what we do here today. And that's how you were raised back then, and that's how all of us was able to be where we are right now.

Okay. He said: I still remembers when my – when me and my father used to walk to Sheshatshiu. I still remember those places where we go. I still knows it, 'cause I can see it when I travel on the plane from here to – no – from Natuashish to Goose Bay. So he knows all the things that – he knows all the area where they went and – and basically that's how they were raised, back in the day.

He said: Where they were raised, and when you – you know – I've always shared my stories to the young generation to let 'em know that's how we live, you know, and how we, you know, survive in the – in the country. And that's – and I usually tell them that this is our lives, this is how we live and this is – you know – life, I guess. In a, short term of a meaning, you know, how they live and not – I guess – not this – this kind of generation.

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

CHIEF NUI: Okay.

Okay. Give you a second.

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

[Music performed.]

ELDER NUI: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Music performed.]

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

CHIEF NUI: Hello.

He's going to do a last song so it's up to everybody if they want to dance again.

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Nui in Mushuau-aimun.]

CHIEF NUI: This song is – was his father – late father's song. So that's the one he's going to play.

ELDER NUI: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

[Music performed.]

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Hart in Innu-aimun.]

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER:
(Inaudible.)

ELDER NUI: [Mushuau-aimun spoken.]

CHIEF HART: Test. One, Two.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER:
(Inaudible.)

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Hart in Innu-aimun.]

CHIEF HART: I know.

[Dialogue between Elder Nui and Chief Hart in Innu-aimun.]

CHIEF HART: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken]

I don't know if – maybe I was already translated?

Okay. I'll just go and translate for myself then.

So I would like – like to thank Joachim, the Elder. It's an honour actually to have Joachim here because since the Elder in our community passed away a few years back, that was playing the drum, Joachim over – took over the invites 'cause where he's the only drummer now.

But I was telling Judge Igloorte, back in the day when my dad – that my dad is not from here originally – but my grandfather was the drum player. And my dad was telling me how he – he couldn't sit in my grandfather's drum-playing times for a while, before he got accepted. So it wasn't something that was natural. You had to be – I guess – get to – known and get accepted after a while. So it's a very sacred ...

And the way I see it, he's the one that keeps an eye on both communities, 'cause he's like – in our – the way I see it, in my views is, he's our leader – he's the top leader. Like, he's the grandfather. And I think the grandfather and the grandmother in the communities are the key for the household; doesn't matter if you have your own house. That's where every – grandchildren will run to if they are in trouble, or just wanting something from the grandparents. But it is important to see this still going on.

And I'm happy that he – he's here, actually, to witness this today; I'm very honoured. And for an Elder to help us to start this Inquiry, I think it's very important. And he probably sees a lot more vision than we see here today. That he – what's going to come out of it. That's how I see it.

Anyway, thank you guys, and I hope everyone has a great day.

P. RALPH: Thank you very much, Chief Hart, again, and thank you to Elder Nui and Elder Penashue. I think it was a fantastic start to the day. I'll let Gerry and Anne translate.

Are they?

Is there translating? Okay.

I think we have translating now? Great.

Yes, thanks again to Elder Penashue and Elder Nui. It was a very meaningful way for the Commissioners and for everyone to

hear from you and to hear the drumming. I think those of us who –

Can't hear anything?

Okay.

I would encourage anyone to read about Elder Nui, and also what it means to be a drummer, and the – the significant role that that plays in the community.

This brings to a close the opening ceremonies today. Tomorrow we'll resume again at 9:30 – and tomorrow morning resume again at 9:30, and first we're going to hear from Annie Picard. She's going to give us the Sheshatshiu Innu timeline. If anyone has not seen that, it's a particularly moving and a fascinating account of the history of the Innu.

And we'll also hear from two Sheshatshiu Elders. We're going to hear from Elder Elizabeth Penashue again tomorrow, and also Elder Penote Antuan.

So anticipate tomorrow is going to be a full day and hopefully be as meaningful and as helpful as today's opening session was. So again, thank you.

So we're finished for the day, but I'd ask for the Commissioners and for the lawyers to stay behind for a few moments.

CLERK (Battcock): That concludes the formal hearings for today.

Thank you all.