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

English Transcript | Volume 11

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

Sheshatshiu

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thanks for doing the session. We welcome you to the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes for Innu in Child Protection.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: We especially welcome any Innu Elders that are here and we will – Penote's here, and we will be expecting Elizabeth in a few minutes time – and here she comes through the door.

We welcome our special guests, first-time – uh, second-time visitors to the Inquiry: Louise Bradley, who is our healing services coordinator for the Inquiry. She can stand and wave.

Mr. Kenn Richard from Toronto, who's an Indigenous child welfare expert; lots of experience in that field and we're relying on him for – for help.

We welcome all counsel from various government departments; as well, Mr. Kennedy, representing the family of one of the parties which will be appearing at a later time. That's for Simeon and Ruby Tshakapesh.

We welcome Mr. Alan Doody, who's the Deputy Minister for Children, Seniors and Social Development. We're very happy to have him here.

Got anything more to add?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Thank you. Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: As we also said this morning, we're very grateful that the community of Sheshatshiu is so welcoming to the Inquiry. We have received a very similar warm welcome from Natuashish.

I send my regrets – me and Anastasia – for our third Commissioner, Mr. Mike Devine. He is attending – he's not attending, rather, because of some sudden and unexpected family circumstances keeping him away.

We want to thank Mary Ann Montague and David Penashue for having come before the Inquiry this morning. We learn so much from what you say to us.

This afternoon we have Mr. David Nuke, who is wishing to speak to the Inquiry. I've known David since he was a boy. He has never been afraid to speak out for the Innu, Innu values, Innu community, Innu freedom. In his lifetime, he has worked with all of the Innu leadership in their effort to make people understand the value of Innu life. He's not as famous as his father, but he's pretty close.

David, you have come here because you would like the Inquiry to hear about your experiences, or other people's experiences that you know about, which is important for the Inquiry to understand; and please feel free to talk in your own language or in English, whatever you feel comfortable with, and as long as you like. We'll stop you tomorrow morning.

[Dialogue between Interpreter Nuna and D. Nuke in Sheshatshiu-aimun.]

D. NUKE: Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Igloliorte, Anastasia Qupee and people here in this facility. First of all, as James Igloliorte said, my name is David Nuke. I'm the – Innu from this community. I'm not highly as educated as many of my other colleagues may be. I only went as far as Grade 7, and I left school at early stages in my life, due to the – the abuse that we went through in our school system.

I'm a victim of the church. I'm also a victim of residential school, and also a victim of scoop of sixties. I've been involved with the Innu Nation leadership for the last 40 years. All the leaders that I've fought with, worked with, like Ben Michel, Daniel Ashini, Greg Penashue, Joseph Riche, Tony Penashue, Charlie Andrew, they're all passed on. I don't know if I'm probably the only one left of the people that fought for – for Innu rights and advocating Innu rights throughout the world. And it's been a horrendous fight between Canada and the Innu. But let's not forget the Innu are fighters, who will continue to fight.

I just wanna touch on issues relating to education. I'm very familiar with what sort of implications has it on to the Innu people as a result of scoop of sixties. Many of my people at the beginning stages in life that were told: we will be lawyers, we will be doctors, we will be policemen, we will be pilots, teachers and so on. None of that ever materialized in my recollection to what I see today. That is the reason why we're very limited of educational positions in areas such as construction.

I noticed this change, or a problem when I worked in Voisey Bay. I spent 10 years in Voisey Bay. I – I – I done heavy equipment, I done environmental studies for four and a half years, I done many other things on my own. As the project progresses for construction, I realized how incompetent my people were in terms of trades. They couldn't take on trades because they were not certified on the trades that they wanted to take on.

Where we were fitted in was in the labour – in the labour section of a construction project: in catering, where we mop the floors, sweep the floors, wash the pans, make the beds. We all learned that in residential schools. We all learned that in scoop of sixties. We've learned that in prisons. That was the trade that we can only handle. And if you look at the Inuit, which is James Igloliorte's people, look at James today; he's a retired judge.

If you look at the Innu today, the Inuit are 22 years older – 22 years ahead of us in terms of education. We're so behind from the Inuit. The Inuit got pilots, they got doctors, they got lawyers, they got nurses, they got social workers, they got RCMP, they got everything. But you look out – out of this building today, see what we got? We got nothing. That's what scoop of sixties done to my people. That's what the abuse done to my people.

You know, it's interesting, I just wanna touch base on something that may not be related to, but it surely is an eye opener for me. I have a grandson in the correctional centre, in the prison system. I notice in the correctional centre, there's a big construction on – on the side of that facility. They're building an extension. And I asked the guard on duty what was the extension for? To recruit or to bring in 12 or 10 more prisoners. That just blew my mind. I would assume he would say that extension is for programs to be brought in the system, so to – to prepare Innu people before they get out. That extension is to add more prisoners in the prison system.

It – it just – it bothers me and I'm not gonna let this go and I'll bring it up to the Innu Nation and I'll bring it up to the leadership and so on, you know. And the system has failed the Innu – failed the Innu. And I look upon issues that the Innu Nation is dealing with in terms of land claims settlement, and probably more IBAs, impact benefit agreements, for projects. And we don't – we

don't have the – the – the necessities to move forward.

I spent part of my life fighting for Innu rights. I've been arrested in Vancouver; I've been arrested in Montreal; I've been arrested in Ottawa; I've been arrested in St. John's. That was part of my duty, to advocate to the Innu – for the Innu people. We went to Europe, we went to the UN. We didn't get what we got today on a silver platter. We got it by fighting, letting the Canadians know the injustices, the impact by government on the Innu people.

You know, sometimes it makes me wonder where – where are we leading the Innu? It seems like it's us now that are leading the – the Innu, but no direction. You know, the important – how the Government of Canada entertained the idea of reconciliation. Canada said I'm sorry to the Inuit of Labrador. And Canada has yet to say I'm sorry to the Innu. But what will that mean? It meant nothing in the Inuit world, based on my friends that I have close contact with, who are still experiencing the – the crisises [sic] that they had experienced over that time. And we're still experience it ourselves.

Reconciliation to me, in my interpretation, would be to ask Canada to provide resources so we can train people to be wildlife officers, to be fishery officers, to be police officers, to be pilots, to be welfare officers, to be social assistance people, to be teachers. That's what reconciliation would mean to me if I was asked to interpret.

You know, the Pope made a very interesting remark, which Canada probably didn't anticipate of hearing it from the Pope. If you go back to the statement the Pope made, the Pope used the word – I didn't – I forgot the name of the word, what – killing a nationhood lifestyle. That's what Canada was doing to its young people – young Indigenous people in Canada – was killing another nation's nation – nationhood. And that word was used by the Pope. And I think that should be looked into and so on.

Genocide, I'm talking about. The Pope used the word genocide. Is James Igloliorte, Anastasia Qupee use that word, or is it too offensive for them? Or is it too offensive for the government to realize the implications that they have put onto my people.

I have grandkids. I have great-grandkids as well. I don't know where I'm leading them, but I'd like to know how I would want to lead them. Is there resources? No. Is there a plan? No. I think when we talk about the damages, the – the pain that – of what our people went through, it's – it – it doesn't end here. It doesn't end in this – in this process and it doesn't start here in this process.

I want to share a story with you, what happened about 36, 37 years ago. Anastasia was probably too young to – to see it at that time, but I seen it and that's where I begin my life with the Innu. When I was hired, I was brought into that building across from here, the old gymnasium. When I was brought in that building, there was – on the floor of the gymnasium, was about 80 – approximately 80 Elders. I'm talking about Elders; 80, 85, 90-year-old people, mapping out the floor of where they were born. Naming the lake where they were born, naming the river, the burial sites, the gathering sites. There were 80 people or more on the floor. Today, we got none. We got no Innu left in this community that could play the drum. We only have one in Natuashish. When that's gone, we got nothing.

So with this Inquiry, I don't know what it will bring, nor have I have faith in it. We've been inquired to death by so many times. There's been so many inquiries, there's been so many studies, done for the Innu. But one thing we're – I'm sure will continue, we will continue to be people. Innu means people, just in case you don't know. And that's what we are. We will always be people and we will always continue the struggle.

I have a six-year-old at home. His name is (inaudible). A lot of people have heard about him. He's a young – he's young – my grandchild. And you should hear him, how argumentative he is. I hope he continues to

be, not in a bad way but in a good way. But I – I'm teaching him as much as I can even though I was not educated as well as other people. I left my community when I was 15. I worked in Kuujjuaq in 1976, and I also worked in Schefferville, like, at the same time. And then I came back and then went back to school and done aviational [sic] – Canadian aviational [sic] firefighting with Transport Canada; Department of National Defense. Then I went with heavy equipment, and done environmental studies. I done everything on my own.

I have to say, today I have the best of two worlds and I'm – I'm very fortunate. Really fortunate to be able to sit here today and address these issues with you. So I hope this Inquiry will lead to some significance – results, you know. I hope this will not be dust off 10 years from now after I'm gone and so on, or 20 years, whatever. I hope something will transpire from this process. I hope our young people will have a meaningful trades, meaningful training.

There is Anne, she's my niece. She's in the school system over 20 years. She has yet to see a change. So James Igloliorte, Anastasia Qupee, please make this happen, please take it somewhere and give us meaningful results. Not me, but people behind – behind me.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

So David or Anne, we would really like the Innu community to hear that in Innu-aimun. I don't know how much you caught, Anne. And maybe David can help you as you're doing some of the translation? But it's very important for this to go out to the Innu community in your language. So why don't we let Anne start –

D. NUKE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: – and you can help her out when she misses something.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Any more that she might have missed?

D. NUKE: No, she said it all.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You want to say in –

D. NUKE: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: You're good?

D. NUKE: Yeah. (Inaudible.)

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay.

David, thank you very much for your thoughtful comments. Not only have you suffered a great deal yourself in your struggles, but you understand what the Innu people have been trying to achieve for so many years. We hear you when you say that the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador have to settle your land claim issue so that you can decide your own future as Innu people.

You are recommending that the Inquiry speak to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and let them understand that educational programs, training programs, programs to help Innu move forward have to be put in place. You are telling us to recommend to the governments that the Innu – they should understand the Innu will not go away. We hear you. We will pass on that information, and we thank you once again for speaking so well.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I want to thank David for coming and sharing his thoughts and – and I invite him again to speak at another time as well.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: That's true.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mm-hmm.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Don't be afraid of coming back any time.

Thank you all.

About 10 minutes, please, before we pick up again.

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