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

English Transcript | Volume 21

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

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COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Ready whenever.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

Good morning, everybody. We're about to start now, so thank you and welcome to those who are here today. Of course, we want to acknowledge our Elder Tshaukuesh Penashue and those who haven't been here today – those for whom it's their first visit here. I know there's a few here, so a special welcome to you people.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Translate – translator.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you.

INTERPRETER NUNA: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: So we'll now have our opening prayer.

ELDER PENASHUE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Michael.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you very much for that.

So the first thing I want to do is just some housekeeping things and to highlight that we have healing support services here, and I'll give you the names of the people who are here today – this morning. But also that, you know, what people – what you may hear during the session this morning may be upsetting to people and they may find that they're triggered and have some memories of their own situations, whether you're talking yourself or whether you're just listening. And so I'd like for you to think about, you know, support people that you might have in your own life, such as family or friends.

So I'll give you the list of the healing support services team that is here this morning, and they are: Kandice Gosine – she's not here – these – some people are not right here in the room but they're either on their way or in the building – Michel Nuna, Edward Nuna, Elizabeth Sheppard and Louise Bradley.

Also just wanted to mention that we have some food here down to my left, coffee and, I think, tea, water and some other things for people to eat for nourishment. We also have a tent outside that I'm assuming is heated this morning, I didn't check myself but it usually is, the stove going for people who they want a little break and just go out and have some quiet out there.

So I'm not sure if there's anything else my fellow Commissioners wanted to say or if Caitlin needs to add anything to the comments this morning.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Nastash?

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Mmm.

C. URQUHART: Do you just want to mention it's – you might just want to mention that it's recorded and then that it will only be shared if they agree – if they choose.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Okay.

Yes, also, the proceedings are recorded and it will – it's not recorded live. So it'll only be shared, for those who are presenting this morning, if they're okay with that. It's up to them.

Okay, anything else?

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Good morning.

I just wanna welcome everybody again to the start of the Inquiry and – [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you very much.

We had – this is the second week now in Sheshatshiu. We are very happy that the

participation – even though we only sat for three days, the participation last week was excellent and we wanna continue that pattern. We'll be here until Thursday this week.

The person who was scheduled to speak first was called into work, but very, very grateful to have Mânîmat to speak to the Commission today.

ELDER ANDREW: Good morning, everybody.

My name is Marie Martha Andrew, but in Innu it's Mânîmat. First of all, I work at the school and I have a class at 11 and I teach our Innu language, Innu-aimun. I teach from kindergarten to Grade 3, and I love my job and teaching our kids the language. And there's some more other Innu teachers in junior high and high school.

I've been talking to people and, like I said, this Inquiry has given me a chance to express my own feelings and how I look at it, of what has – had happened in the past. I know people need to hear from the people who are affected by this.

Like, people that – my people, the Innu people, they were really, really happy to be out on the land. They came – that's where they came from. Then everything was very new to them when they were told to stay here in the community in 1960.

They seen a lot of changes and that's how we seen a lot of social issues when they were told to stay in this community. And it was all done by the priest. He made – he threatened the people. They say if you don't have your child attend school, they're gonna lose their Family Allowance, which I don't think was very much in those days.

But it cost them a lot of – it cost them a lot to be here in the community. Like when – like I said, we never had anybody to – they never had anybody to control them when they were living off the land in their traditional way of life. Even though it was a struggle, they still managed to make it through every day. They never had no – like, we have transportation today, but, in those days, all they had was toboggan and snowshoes. That was their way of travelling all over the area, and they covered a lot of area.

What gives me the strength today is, like my mother said to me when we were fighting, protesting, she said this is our land. So that's what gave me the strength. And still today, I feel that she's – she is right. That's why I want to continue and fight for my people.

When I look at kids being taken away from our community, put in another – in other places. Like today, you take a kid, and they just take them and they don't have no – they don't talk to the parents or the younger parents. They should teach them first. Tell them why they're being taken.

And we have a lot of problems with housing in our community. And some houses, people that live in the houses, there's a lot of people in there. How would you feel if you had a lot of people, a lot of kids in the houses? You need your own space.

Like what I was saying about – with housing, there's overcrowding. People need to have space. People need to take care of their own children in their own houses. I think that would make a lot of difference if people had their own houses, the younger women or men.

And another thing is we was never taught about our Innu history when we was going to school. All we learned about was Americans, Canadians; nothing about the Indigenous people that lived all across this land.

And this is where we get so – today it's very overwhelming because the students at the school, they haven't been taught about the history of the Innu people. When you talk to them, when you do the timeline, they say: Oh, I didn't know this happened, when we talk about our own experiences when we was in school. And the people starts to get – they get angry of what happened, like the

beatings you get from the priest or the teacher.

Nobody – we didn't have nowhere to go and tell our parents. I think that they were more fearful to go and talk to these – to the priest or to the teachers because they were made to live in fear. And today I look at it and I see so many people has been damaged. People has – it's like you're wounded and they got you where they want you to be.

I know I don't have to be a genius to know this. I know that it was all planned out, what they were gonna do with the Innu people. It's not only the Innu people; there's Inuit people, too. The same thing is happening to them. There's two groups of people here in Labrador.

And it's very tiring, you know, we have to stand up and fight for what is right. It is our children. When you take a child outside, it's like you taking part – you're taking away part of us because that's our child. He's Innu.

But through this, I'm very – I have hope. Through the recommendations that is going to be – there's been a lot – I think some people are glad that this is happening. Like, I've never seen people come here and listen to you, listen to your story, listen to your pain, your anger.

That's what – and I want to say that I hope that something good will come out of this Inquiry. And like I said before, I'm very thankful for the Commissioners for listening to us and the lawyers for trying to help the Innu people.

And I just wanted to say thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Tshenashkumitin.

Now also, Mânîmat, first from your sister.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: [Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

I just want to thank Martha. Martha is my sister. I thank her for coming. She's been a teacher for many years with our community. And she and both – my other sister taught Innu-aimun. So I'm very grateful to have teachers who are continuing on to teach our children Innu-aimun. And also, thinking ahead as well, too, in terms of things we'd like to see for young families. It's a direction, also, that we'd like to also hear from, from the community.

Thank you. Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Yeah, you spoke in Innu-aimun.

Go ahead, Mike.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, I also want to say thank you for coming today, and thank you for your, I guess, hope for the Inquiry that we'll have some positive outcomes. We certainly hope and believe that it can have some positive outcomes for the Innu people.

You've also given us some very, I think, clear recommendations in terms of what's needed in the community for the language of the Innu, the Innu-aimun. As well as, you talk about the housing as another very critical issue. These are basic needs that people have and we should be – you well deserve to have them and more.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: I also express my thanks for your participation.

Everyone understands that the parties who designed how this Inquiry should work wanted to have a component that allowed ordinary people to speak to the Inquiry.

So in this part of the Inquiry, we want the people in the province to understand Innu history, Innu experience. So when an ordinary person in the province listens to someone from the community, then they are getting understanding about the Innu experience.

Of course, as time goes on, we will hear from lawyers, we will hear from advocates,

we will hear from scholars, but today we want to make sure that there's a clear message from community members.

And the perspective you give us is one that, while there has been many hardships still happening, it is still a story and a history of hope. And this is why the parties: the Innu, the Innu Round Table, the province and Canada wanted to see recommendations that offer hope.

Thank you, Martha.

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