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Subject: RCAP Hearing Summary, Davis Inlet, December 1, 1992

UNEDITED SUMMARY REPORT ON ROYAL COMMISSION HEARINGS

RED BY: Angela Slaughter
 DIAND
DATE: 01-12-92
Starting Time: 11:02
Adjournment Time: 16:33
LOCATION: Davis Inlet,
 Labrador

WITNESS:

1. Cajetan Rich, former chief of Mushuau Innu Band
2. Katie Rich, Chief - Band Council of Davis Inlet
3. George Rich, Vice-President of the Innu Nation
4. George Gregoire, Innu Nation
5. Simeon Tshakapesh, Tribal Police - Youth Council
6. Raphael Gregoire, Innu Nation - Education
7. Ben Andrew, Innu Nation
8. Peter Peneshue, President Innu Nation
9. Gordon Warner, Construction Consultant on Relocation

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

1. Co-Chair Georges Erasmus
2. Commissioner Mary Sillett
3. Commissioner of the Day David Nui

S. Y:

Focused on relocation of the community to the mainland. There was unanimous agreement from politicians, citizens and non-native technical people that relocation would be best. Expressed a need to be in control of everyday issues, stressing the importance of education, mental health and policing. Recommendations included having the NFLD government recognize two Innu men who had received police training as official community police officers, the development of a healing centre, the implementation of traditional Innu curriculum in the education system, and increased recreational facilities for youth.

Innu land claims and self-government were popular topics of the day. Presenters agreed that the land claims must be settled soon and that self-government was essential to improve the lives of the Innu at Davis Inlet.

Co-Chair Erasmus spoke about the possibility of the RCAP publishing an interim paper on the alternatives available now that the constitutional accord is dead. Stated that if interim reports are published, they will be released in the spring or summer of 1993.

CBC was present and interviewed Chief Katie Rich and Simeon Tshakapesh, a local

tribal peacemaker.

REPORT: (By Witness)

1. Cajetan Rich, former chief of Mushuau Innu Band (11:02 - 11:15)

Gave an overview of the history of the Mushuan Innu at Davis Inlet. Included the role of the church and government in the decision making process for the Innu in the past.

2. Katie Rich, Chief - Band Council of Davis Inlet (11:15 - 12:21)

Relocation was cited as a community priority. The new site will allow for future expansion, provide a base on the mainland, allow access to natural resources and adequate hunting grounds and provide a potable water supply with the opportunity to develop their own hydro project. The lack of potable water in the current Davis Inlet has been confirmed by five studies done by different agencies and departments and is one of the main reasons that the community wishes to relocate to Sango Bay. Inadequate water supply makes it difficult to keep children clean and contributes to a health problem. Explained that when the Innu were relocated the province promised them better housing and they are concerned that this promise has led to dependency on government.

Expressed the need for local authority in areas such as housing, policing and education. Criticized the education system which makes derogatory comments against culture, mannerisms and children. Recommended taking control of the local education and incorporate traditional values and concepts including lifeskills. Believes that elders should play an active role in education and that some non-Aboriginal material should be replaced by elders stories as a first step. Felt it was important to encourage Innu teachers aides to become certified teachers.

Several concerns were raised including alcoholism, suicide attempts and mental health concerns. Recommended a family oriented treatment of problems. Blamed the tragedy that took the lives of six children earlier this year on alcoholism. Criticized the government for refusing to do an inquiry into the incident which the Innu took upon themselves to complete.

3. George Rich, Vice-President of the Innu Nation (13:25 - 14:34)

Stated a need for control over school, store, clinic RCMP and any initiative that affects the lives of the Innu. Concerned that he was never taught about his people in school and about the amount of racism that is present in the education system.

Recommended that the peacemakers be recognized as police officers. Considered the announcement that the RCMP made in March regarding the fire that killed six children in their community a "farce". Stated that the RCMP had been asked to come into the community in January. No one came, and then in February, the fire took place.

Reported that there had been forty-six suicide attempts in the past year and recommends that there be a healing centre developed for Davis Inlet. Complained that bureaucrats never listen and that the Innu must always repeat themselves. There is never enough money available. One reason for this is that the Innu

are not recognized under the Indian Act. They do not want to be restricted under the Indian Act, but do desire to be recognised in a way so that they can obtain access to funding.

Pointed out that the only reason that they are on this island is because the government put them there. Questioned when the government would look at the suffering.

Sympathized with the people of the Oka crisis. Recognized how frustrating it can be when it comes to dealing with government. Realizes that they too could choose militant behaviour, but his people have always been peace-loving people.

Spoke in depth regarding self-government, self-determination and Innu land claims. Stressed that the Canadian Constitution must be changed. The Innu must be recognized as an independent nation who have never ceded any land, felt that the Innu nation should not have to wait until land settlements are legal, but should begin to demonstrate self-government now.

4. George Gregoire, Innu Nation (14:34 - 14:37)

Spoke about the lack of potable water in the community and problems related to this. Supported the demand for relocation, land claims, and improvements in social services that is negatively affected by logistical problems.

5. Simeon Tshakapesh, Tribal Police - Youth Council (14:37 - 15:06)

Concerned that youth are not given the resources that they need. Believes that in order for youth to grow, the cycle of dependency must be broken and that education must be controlled by the community so that language can be protected. Felt it was important that youth be consulted as to what type of recreation facilities they would like and that there be funding to deliver these projects. There is constant peer pressure to sniff gas, destroy property, and abuse alcohol and drugs. Recommended that a professional youth worker be hired to work in Davis Inlet so that the youth have some place to turn.

Criticized the provincial government for not recognising he and his brother as policemen although they have received police training at the First Nation Justice Tribal Institute in British Columbia equivalent to that which is given to RCMP officers. Felt that language and cultural factors made them even more qualified than regular RCMP to police Davis Inlet. It was pointed out that other police departments such as Vancouver hired graduates from the same training course yet the NFDL government says they are not qualified.

6. Raphael Gregoire, Innu Nation - Education (15:06 - 15:34)

Stated that self-government is the only answer to rebuild traditional lives. Acknowledged that financial resources would be necessary to accomplish self-government but would lead to greater self-sufficiency in the long-run.

Stressed that Innu control of education was a necessity. Wishes to set up an Innu Education Board as a step in this direction. Believes that by controlling education, assimilation will cease to continue. States that it is frustrating to hear his children resort to English words when the Innu word cannot be found although he recognizes that assimilation has been slower in Davis Inlet than in

other areas. Innu curriculum would include having youth being instructed in the country, on traditional ways.

7. Ben Brew, Innu Nation (15:45 - 15:55)

Stated that colonization had stripped people of many traditional values. Criticized the government for dividing aboriginal people into classes. Believes that there is no such thing as an "Indian" and that this is a colonial term that segregates by race. Advocated the right to be violent when rights are threatened and declared that every nation has a right to protect itself from foreigners.

8. Peter Peneshue, President Innu Nation (15:55 - 16:27)

Addressed the social problems that are present in Davis Inlet which include gas sniffing, alcohol and drug abuse, and family violence. Recommended that the government provide funding to develop a long-term healing centre. Believed that treatment should be holistic in nature and that to deal with any problem you must look back to your childhood which can sometimes be a very painful process.

Spoke about land claims and maintained that the Innu have a strong claim to the land, yet receive no royalties. Argued that if the provincial government was truly positive that the land belonged to the province then they would not be negotiating with the Innu at this time.

Stated that the Innu were tired of being the subjects of so many studies. Stressed that relocation is necessary and felt that it was time that the government realized this and acted on it.

Felt that self-government was needed to ensure that Innu people could control every aspect of their lives. Stated that the Innu supported the referendum process and that even though it failed it did succeed in planting the seed in the minds of Canadians to prepare them for native self-government.

9. Gordon Warner, Construction Consultant on Relocation (16:27 - 16:33)

Spoke about technical reasons why the relocation of the Innu of Davis Inlet must be a priority. Current problems include inadequate water supply, ground that is almost impossible to develop, no water/sewer capabilities and no room for expansion. All of these problems would be solved by relocating to Sango Bay.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS TABLED:

None