

SPEAKING POINTS CHIEF JOHN MARTIN
TO
REGIONAL COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT
ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

January 24, 2007

First of all welcome to Gesgapegiag proud member of the Migmag Nation. We are in the district of Gespegewagi and are inclusive of the entire Gaspé Peninsula as far as the Miramichi River where we reach the district of Signing. The other districts are Pigtug, Sigepnegatig, Pigtug, Epegwitg, Esgigewagi, and Unamagi. The sum of these territories composes the Migmag homeland of Migmagi.

Our people have inhabited these lands since time immemorial, long before the arrival of any Europeans. As many First Nations in North America we were a sovereign people with our governance structures, alliances, economies, languages and cultures.

Some of the elders tell us that our people traded with First Nations far into the interior and on the eastern seaboard as far south as what is known today as Virginia and Florida.

The Migmag were a respected military force at the arrival of the Europeans and into the 1700's. Our pre-confederation treaties of peace and friendship with the British crown are a testament to this fact as well as a testimony to the recognition of the Migmag Nation.

Our treaties contrary to the numbered treaties after confederation were not treaties of land surrender. On the contrary it was protocol at such signings that the British be the first to put their arms in the hole to be buried. The Migmag in return accepted to establish a relationship of peace and friendship.

We maintain that there is no extinguishment of Migmag title and our rights continue to survive through our existence as a people still on their lands, with their own language, and culture and spiritual beliefs. Although there has been deliberate effort by successive governments to assimilate, remove our people off the land and confine our people to the reservation and to incarcerate and punish our people for practicing their traditional beliefs, speaking their languages and exercising their rights, we continue to survive and these actions have not extinguished our rightful title.

Our title is not separable into layers or affected by the evolution of the number or manner we choose to exploit our title with all the freedom that is ours.

The deliberate actions of government to destroy our people has resulted in impairing severely the evolution and growth of our people. Serious efforts were made to make us into wards of the government and to be viewed as marginal living of the good graces of the government and its taxpayers.

To us the contrary is true. This country and its regions were built on the lands and resources of the First Nations of this country and for those of us who have not surrendered our lands and title this remains true.

The Migmag demand that this continued injustice be corrected in an honorable manner. The governments of Quebec and Canada must recognize the injustices of the

past an address the important issue of Migmag title. Our rights are not just philosophical or restricted to mere hunting, fishing and gathering.

We maintain that all exploitation and occupation of Migmag territories without Migmag consent is a violation of our rights and territories and that such exploitation without our consent is seriously questionable.

We understand that there is a relationship to build with you and a future to build with you. Relationships however are built on honesty and the continued effort to resolve our differences. It is also important to understand that we refuse to be held hostage by the populations that occupy the territory with us. The issues of title and resolution can only be addressed between the governments of our respective nations. All we can ask is that you the people not only support us in our efforts to address these injustices, but to stand up for justice and fairness.

It is certain that we have a lot to say about sustainable development on our territories. For years we have helplessly observed the abusive and reckless exploitation of our resources to the point of endangerment.

The Supreme Court of Canada in recent decisions from Delgamugw to the Haida Taku Tlingit River decisions have clearly indicated that there is an obligation on the part of governments to consult and accommodate where there may be aboriginal title. The level of consultations is also an important point and that an invitation to regular

consultations made available to the public are not viewed as appropriate consultation. The consultations must be respectful and honorable.

I never the less come to this meeting because I believe that our message has to be heard. We wish to build a relationship, we have a sincere desire to contribute to the development of our region and wish to be participants in its development. However the government must address our issues so that we can be included.

We are open to the co-management of resources on our ancestral land. Co-management models can be used provisionally while negotiations between our governments progress to resolve the issues of Migmag title.

As pointed out earlier, this is not consultation for us, but it is a welcomed opportunity for us to send our message out to you in hopes that you will consider this message and advise your government to act in an honorable fair and just manner as soon as possible.

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