

Speech by Chairperson Bella Moses Petawabano at the opening of the 2016 Eeyou/Eenou Regional General Assembly on Health and Social Services Waskaganish, April 11, 2016

I would like to welcome you all to this gathering, the 2016 Eeyou/Eenou Regional General Assembly on Health and Social Services. Chief Darlene Cheechoo, and to the Eeyouch of Waskaganish, Pastor Paul Moses, Grand Chief Dr, Mathew Coon-Come,

Among us today we have representatives from all ten communities: Chiefs of each Cree Nation , the Cree Nation Government, Kathleen Wootton, Chairperson of the Cree School Board, Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee, and other entities, as well as from the Cree Health Board. You are participating in this three-day gathering because you are all leaders and agents of change in your communities and in Eeyou Istchee. We welcome your participation to explore the theme of our assembly of “Planning the future of Miyupimaatisiun together.” Mâmû â uwâyâyihitimihkw miyupimâtisîwin ishi nîshtâmihch

Our goal is to elaborate a plan for the future of not just of health and social services in Eeyou Istchee, but of miyupimaatisiun in our communities and entities: we wish to see a society that is balanced, harmonious and nurtures the well-being of each individual, each family and each community. Together we will outline ways that will enable us to take achievable steps to make a difference in our communities. In practical terms, this means that the results of this gathering will guide us to shape the Cree Health Board’s Strategic Regional Plan and put in place actions and organisational structures which will give life to our hopes for a healthier, stronger, and more powerful Eeyou Istchee.

Our discussions over the coming three days aim to produce clear calls to action that will provide concrete steps for each of us as we plan the future of Miyupimaatisiun together. And I stress that last word: we must plan *together* if we aspire to bring back Miyupimaatisiun to our people. Because this is not an objective that can be

fulfilled by one entity, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, any more than it can be fulfilled by one individual. It requires that we work together, that we share our strengths and our knowledge. Only by working together can we achieve Miyupimaatisiun.

Fortunately, we are not alone in this effort. Indeed, we are following the guidelines of the ones who have gone before us, who share our dream: among them, most recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In its 2015 report, the TRC defined a series of action points for federal, provincial, and aboriginal governments and entities, including action points in areas such as child welfare and health care where we at the CBHSSJB have direct responsibilities and can make a clear impact.

We are in this together. The CBH will have specific tasks to make this happen. But so will each Cree Nation, the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, the Cree Trappers Association, the Eeyou Women's Association, in other words, each of the specific communities and entities you are representing at this Assembly.

Creating the environment for Miyupimaatisiun is an effort that must engage the entire Cree nation, from individuals to communities and entities to the Cree Nation Government. For example, we have an epidemic of diabetes. We know that for many, diabetes is directly related to poor nutrition, overweight and obesity, and too little physical activity.

New definitive studies are showing that these factors occur more frequently in populations where individuals have suffered from childhood traumas. Children were placed in residential schools and families were left at home without children. Our culture was under attack. And today we have children and youth growing up in the chaos that brings in Youth Protection Services, with teenage mothers who may or may not have good family supports for themselves and their babies, with the extremely high numbers of Eeyouch – men and women – who report having experienced sexual and other types of abuse.

The concept of Miyupimaatisiun presents a holistic view of each of us within our families and communities and the land. So if so many individuals have and are becoming ill with diabetes, could this mean that our communities are toxic? It seems that our people are not growing up and living in an environment which promotes Miyupimaatisiun.

How are we talking about this as a Cree Nation? This is the kind of question we would like you to address at this Assembly.

This assembly aims to challenge all communities and entities to define real, tangible goals that we can achieve in a predictable timeline – whether it be three years, or four years, or five. When we conclude on Thursday evening, we will have come up with target dates that we can share with communities, and common objectives where Cree entities can work together in effective and productive partnerships.

As I've said, the CHB has a broad positive impact on how we live, work and play; after all, we are Eeyou Istchee's largest employer. But the Cree Nation Government, the Cree School Board, and other entities also have a powerful influence on the health and well being of our people, and we must all work together to ensure that we are able to fulfill our responsibilities to our communities, and to create a strong, healthy Cree nation.

Today we have a number of presentations that will help us as we address questions tomorrow.

I have already mentioned briefly the impact of residential schools on our people.

This morning, we will witness a video interview with George Blacksmith on surviving residential schools, and I know many of you will find much that will resonate for you in this video.

Then we will welcome a presentation by the Cree Nation Government's Lawrence Katapatuk on housing and its importance in building healthy and harmonious communities.

He will be followed by Kathleen Wootton, Chair of the Cree School Board, who will share with us her thoughts on the importance of education to achieving Miyupimaatisiun.

Today we will also learn more about two important initiatives here in Waskaganish. One is just beginning: the Waskaganish women's shelter will have its groundbreaking ceremony later this morning, and you are all invited to attend. This will be our final event before we pause for lunch.

After lunch, George Diamond will help us break the ice and get to know one another a bit better, and then Solomon Awashish will provide an overview of the health profile for Eeyou Istchee. This overview will lead into a round table discussion on our Strategic Regional Plan: why it is important, what we can expect it to do for us, and, most importantly, what it should include.

Finally, we will hear about the second Waskaganish initiative, one that has been ongoing for many years, as David Cheechoo will tell us the story of the Waskaganish Addiction Mobilization Centre, an innovative mobile treatment centre.

The ideas and information we share today are stimulants: they will help us form our questions and discuss the challenges facing Eeyou Istchee tomorrow. These challenges are complex, but they are not insurmountable. In this room we have such resources of knowledge, wisdom, and experience that when we work together, devoting our passion and energy to finding answers, we can transform Eeyou Istchee: we can bring Miyupimaatisiun to our communities. That is our mission for this assembly. And when I survey this room, I am confident that we are up to the challenge.