



Press Release
For immediate release


Independent Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Aboriginal People and Certain Public Services in Quebec: an Announcement beyond Expectations

Val-d'Or, December 21, 2016 – The announcement by the Quebec Government to create an Independent Public Inquiry Commission with a mandate to investigate the relations between police services and Aboriginal people, as well as the delicate and sensitive issue of systemic racism within certain public services, including health, social services and the Director of Youth Protection (DPJ) in Quebec, exceeds the expectations expressed by the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre and Aboriginal women.

According to Sharon Hunter, Director of Social Development and responsible for support and assistance services to the community women: *“For over a year now, these women have kept standing up! They courageously traced a path of hope for other women who will come forward because today’s announcement by the Quebec Premier brought a glimmer of hope.”*

A group of Aboriginal women involved in the denunciation process have gathered at the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre to hear the official announcement of a Quebec-specific Inquiry Commission on the Relations between Aboriginal People and Certain Public Services, including DPJ. For Bernadette Ogushing, one of the women disappointed by the decision of the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecution (DCPP) not to prosecute, *“My life has not only collapsed in a long and dark tunnel the day I was taken to residential school at the age of 13, but later, as an adult woman, I was struggling with successive wounds that impaired my life for many years and heavily impacted my children’s life... Today I can at last see the dawn of justice... Justice for me, my daughters and my granddaughters. I can now feel peace settling into my heart...”*

On her part, Édith Cloutier, Director General of the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre and spokesperson designated by the Aboriginal women before First Nation authorities and the Quebec Government, welcomes the initiative: *“The establishment of an Independent Public Inquiry Commission mandated to investigate the deep-rooted systemic racism in Quebec is an unequivocal political statement that the time of healing and reconciliation between Quebec and First Peoples has finally come.”*



The Native Friendship Centre's Board of Directors and management are pleased to hear that the Commission's mandate includes hearings in Val-d'Or. For President Oscar Kistabish, *"We are confident that this bold and politically courageous initiative will provide a forum where people's stories and truth will be heard, thus allowing to restore Aboriginal people's trust towards police services and justice."*

Thanks to the solidarity of Quebecers from all origins and spheres of influence, be they municipal, regional, provincial, national and international, the message is unanimous: in Quebec, the time has come to speak the truth. An invitation is being made to all those wishing for a more just and equitable Quebec.

A central gathering place and public forum, the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre advocates for the individual and collective rights, interests and well-being of the Aboriginal people faced with the reality of an urban environment.

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