

Draft speaking notes for Grand Chief Beardy for Meeting with Commissioner S. Linden at Forest, Mar 8 & 9, 2006

I am Stan Beardy Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation. I would like to thank Commissioner Sid Linden for inviting us to speak at this hearing today.

In 1905, when Canada was expanding, the Crown came to Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory to make a treaty with us. This process was dictated by the Proclamation of 1763 which recognized our sovereignty and aboriginal rights in the land. The treaty was a Nation-to-Nation or international covenant and the process of entering into a treaty of this sort with us, acknowledged our nationhood. Treaty No. 9 is the only treaty in Ontario that was signed by both Canada and Ontario.

In our view, the James Bay Treaty has three main components:

- First, the Treaty was an agreement to live in peaceful co-existence.
- Second, in recognition of the great advantage in gaining access to our lands and resources, the Crown, in right of Canada and Ontario, made specific promises of annuities and services.
- Third, there was an agreement to share the land and the proceeds from the use of the land. Clearly the intent was that each of our Nations should continue to grow and prosper.

There are a number of points that I wish to make in relation to the treaty agreement.

1. The first, and main point, is that the people of Nishnawbe Aski Nation wish to derive more benefit from the treaty relationship in the second 100 years of the Treaty than they did during the first 100 years of the Treaty.
2. We are partners in two Treaties that cover a land mass greater than two thirds of the Province of Ontario. After a hundred years of misunderstandings and abuse we are still willing to share that land so long as our rights are recognized and we have an equitable share in the management and the benefits of the land. Our Nation continues to have recognizable lands, culture, language and social structure. We had systems of justice and governance at the time of treaty making and continue to do so today.
3. It is sad to note that our major industries at the moment are:
 - the correction of the effects of the abuses of the past one hundred years as evidence in the attempted destruction of our families, our communities and our way of life, including language, spirituality and cultural practices and beliefs.
 - defence of our rights against governments and private interests that either choose not to recognize them or act in a manner that threatens their existence.

- the redevelopment of our governance and systems of justice; and
 - overcoming the effects of being confined in reserves and cut off from the resources necessary to our survival and development.
4. While the healing the effects of the past is necessary, we are ready to enter a new era, an era of cooperative development of our territory for the benefit of our people. We need to build the foundation for our future. We are much more aware now than we were a hundred years ago of the values in our lands and the necessity of our controlling those values. We are willing and ready to move forward, but only as full partners with an equal and equitable voice and benefit in all matters affecting our land and its wealth.
 4. Our communities have great needs but they also have great energy and determination. Our needs can become our greatest assets, since meeting those needs could form the basis of a developing economy, the building of much needed houses, infrastructure such as roads, energy generation and transmission systems, schools, hospitals and business facilities.
 4. Although Nishnawbe Aski Nation shares the concerns of other First Nations and First Nations organizations in Ontario, we have some unique characteristics that set us apart. The greatest part of our territory is as yet undeveloped. Our lands are continuous and contiguous. Our people continue to earn a living from the land and we have been able to maintained our languages, our values and our traditional way of life, although we suffer from a lack of access to the outside world and few of the services enjoyed by other Canadians. Our remoteness has been both a detriment and a benefit.
 4. Our young people need and want the same opportunities that young people in all other parts of Canada and Ontario enjoy. They need education and training so that they can have jobs, accumulate wealth and provide for their families and their communities. Seventy percent of our population is under the age of 29. Of that number a staggering 90 percent are unemployed. I agree with the Minister of Community and Social Services Sandra Pupatello when she pointed out that, "Our people are our greatest resource. When they can fulfill their potential, the entire province benefits." While we believe this is true, we know that we need 10,000 jobs now and at least that many in the next ten years for our people to fulfill their potential.
 4. We look to the government and private enterprise to open a new, and enlightened chapter in the history of Northern Ontario. In the midst of collapsing single industry towns and economies we wish to invent new ways to spark the economy of Northern Ontario. In the face of rising energy costs we want to develop the rich possibilities of wind, hydro and biomass energy generation that exist in our territory. In the grip of pressures to clear cut beyond the area of the "undertaking", we wish to develop a plan for sustainable forest development that will preserve the forests while creating a balanced forest industry. We want to

pursue opportunities to develop economic models whose primary aim is the long term support of people and communities rather than corporate profits. Figures published by the government of Ontario indicate that more than two billion dollars will be invested in northern Ontario industry this year. Such investment will support diamond mining, forestry, alternate energy, call centres and service industry startups and expansions. Clearly the resources and the interest exists to create a thriving northern economy.

4. The Government and private industry must recognize that we are the people on the land and that we are not going anywhere. While government and industry must deal with us out of necessity, we would prefer that you deal with us out of common interest and a desire for mutual benefit. We are not averse to development. We count among our successes thriving transportation and communications businesses, power generation and distribution enterprises, telecommunications businesses, forestry developments and lumber mills.
4. We are averse to, and will not tolerate, stripping resources from our territories that provides little or no benefit to our people while destroying the land and our relationship to it. We estimate that 20 billion dollars a year are realized from resources taken from our territory. This has been going on for more than a hundred years and it is time that some of that money flowed through our collective economies.
4. Let us take a new look at our relationship and the possibilities for the future. I have been reading recently about new approaches to old ideas. For example, recent exploration at a Red Lake mine determined that a rich vein of gold ore had been overlooked during the original exploration and evaluation, based on the criteria and accepted knowledge of the day. New thinking and new approaches to mining have given the mine a new lease on life and access to even greater riches. Thus, the barriers that have separated us from the mainstream are coming down one at a time. The geographic distances are now spanned with air travel and electronic communication. Access to goods and services is bound to improve with the development of all weather roads, as is the access to markets for goods and services developed in our communities. We need to be included in determining new approaches to the growth and development of northern Ontario, to jointly develop a Northern Strategy for NAN Territory. While such a strategy should not prejudice the aboriginal and treaty rights of NAN First Nations or the discussions and negotiations between NAN and Ontario regarding treaty relationship and governance, a new strategy might include:
 - a. The development of a Nishnawbe Aski Nation Centenary Fund for bilateral discussions regarding the lands within the Treaty areas.
 - b. The assessment of strategic opportunities for economic development and expansion in northern Ontario and the identification of necessary support services to facilitate such expansion.
 - c. The creation of a Bilateral Table on northern development that

would provide a broad overview of potential areas in which the northern economy could be developed and diversified equitably with respect to First Nations rights and the spirit and intent of the Treaties; identify related infrastructure and capacity-building requirements needed to support appropriate economic development expansion; develop a joint approach to benefit from Canada's Northern Strategy that will interleave with and augment the NAN/Ontario bi-lateral initiative and agreements; and provide stable funding to support identification and further documentation of particular opportunities in key northern economic sectors.

- d. The development of a strategic investment plan to attract third party developmental monies based on governmental investment.
 - e. The assessment of resource potential in and around NAN Territory including forestry, mining, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism and other resource development potential.
 - f. The development of an approach to including NAN First Nations in resources management and development as principals.
 - g. The development of a support strategy for manufacturing and value added aspects of resource utilization by NAN First Nations and in the NAN region in general, to be supported by the attraction of third party investment.
 - h. The development of a northern transportation and infrastructure study for the NAN Region.
11. The next hundred years will bring changes that we can only begin to imagine. Our traditional lands include a region rich in mineral resources (diamonds, platinum, gold), fresh water, timber, undeveloped energy sources and tourist opportunities. Our people are eager and willing to start working on the development of these resources. However, we need assistance in developing a plan for the next hundred years, a plan that would see the north grow and prosper for all of the people on the land and for everyone else in Ontario.

Meegwetch

Stan Beardy
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