

REMARKS OF VICE-CHIEF GHISLAIN PICARD

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS (Canada)

UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS
ISSUES

NEW YORK, 12 MAY 2003

(Brief remarks in Innu)

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Permanent Forum on indigenous issues concerning children and youth.

Children and youth cannot go without the wisdom of elders. The Assembly of First Nations, representing over 600 communities in Canada, urges the Permanent Forum to support the International Elders Summit as a conclusion to the Decade of indigenous peoples in 2004.

The Unity Ride and Run, led by our children, will journey thousands of miles on foot and horse to officially open the Elders Summit in Six Nations and Hamilton, in southern Ontario.

Children are the most important indicator of the health and well-being of our societies and peoples. If children, and the mothers to whom they are born, are uniformly not doing well, then you can be sure that the society of which they are part is threatened.

Unfortunately, even in a highly developed G8 economy like Canada, indigenous peoples are still facing what, in 1988, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called “gross disparities” on all levels, with a sometimes deadly effect on our children.

According to a recent study, the ranking of First Nations in Canada would be approximately 63rd on the UNDP scale – that is, lower than the standard of living of less economically flourishing countries such as Vietnam, Botswana, El Salvador or Tunisia.

- Indigenous Fetal Alcohol Syndrome occurs at rates up to three hundred times higher than in most western countries
- Indigenous infant mortality in Canada is almost twice as high as the rate of infant mortality overall in Canada
- Indigenous life expectancy is still roughly six years lower than other Canadians
- Tuberculosis is forty-three times higher among registered Indians than among non-Aboriginals in Canada. Many of the lives that are prematurely lost to ill health, violence and suicide are those of indigenous children

- Nous souffrons de la diabète à des taux qui sont souvent parmi les plus élevés au monde. Plusieurs parmi ces victimes sont nos enfants et nos jeunes.
- Notre taux de mort accidentelle, qui affecte particulièrement nos enfants, sont 6,5 fois plus élevés que celui des autres Canadiens
- Pour tout indicateur socio-économique, les femmes indigènes – les mères de nos enfants – sont au dernier rang. Elles courent les plus grands risques de violence, une situation qui affecte le futur même des peuples indigènes
- Il existe aussi un taux horriblement élevé de suicide chez les jeunes autochtones. Selon la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones, ces statistiques transmettent un message clair et choquant au gouvernement du Canada qu'un nombre important des peuples autochtones au Canada croient qu'ils ont plus de raisons de mourir que de vivre.

En 1996, la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones a indiqué que les peuples indigènes sont aux marges de la société canadienne et se trouvent au bord d'une extinction économique, politique et culturelle. La commission a déclaré que le gouvernement du Canada doit prendre action de façon généreuse et décisive pour assurer la survie économique, politique et culturelle des nations autochtones.

Depuis 1996, de nombreux comités des droits de la personne de l'ONU et commissions canadiennes en sont venus aux mêmes conclusions.

Overall, however, the Canadian government continues to refuse to work with Aboriginal peoples to fully implement the comprehensive and unanimous findings of its own Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

The federal government refuses, as called for in 1999 by the UN Committee on Human Rights, to ensure the restoration of adequate lands and resources to First Nations to ensure the survival of our peoples.