

Speech
by Michel Létourneau,
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during the European Tour
(Paris, Strasbourg, London and Barcelona)

from November 16 to 24, 2002

The spoken version takes precedence

Customary greetings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to speak to you today and, on behalf of the Québec government, to describe the innovative and progressive approach that we have developed in our relations with aboriginal nations.

Québec government reached two historic agreements with the Crees and the Inuit, better known as the “Paix des braves” and “Sanarrutik”.

I am very proud to be able to share these accomplishments of Québec with you, especially since these two agreements, which were reached in the region that I live in and represent, namely Nord-du-Québec, will have huge impact on our communities and on Québec as a whole.

(Globally, the aboriginal question is one of the government’s priorities. There are 11 aboriginal nations in Québec, all very much alive and growing demographically, who share a large territory with other Quebecers. **We see this as extraordinarily beneficial.**

Moreover, in Québec, **we feel that being a nation that lives in French is compatible with recognizing other nations** that live in Québec, within the context of a culturally rich and dynamic society.)

Allow me to present my region in greater detail.

Nord-du-Québec region covers 840 000 km². It represents 55% of Québec's territory. This area corresponds roughly to that of Ungava, the electoral district I have been representing in the National Assembly since 1994.

It is a region three and a half times the size of the United Kingdom or six and half times the size of England.

The regional population is 38 575, of which 29% are Crees (Grand Chief Ted Moses people) – and 23 % are Inuit. In other words, roughly half the population is Quebecois and the other half is aboriginal. The population is young, almost 50% are under 25 years old, as the Cree and Inuit populations are experiencing strong demographic growth.

(The three nations, Québec, the Crees and the Inuit, are keenly interested in developing their territory.)

Nord-du-Québec is a region with great natural wealth and extraordinary potential. Four broad development sectors provide most of the employment in the region: mining, forest operations, hydroelectricity production and tourism.

The mining potential in diamonds, gold and other minerals is being developed. Forestry operations are very efficient and a mainstay in the economy.

Over half of Québec's hydroelectric power (15 000 megawatts) is produced in our region and tourism is growing by leaps and bounds.

You will appreciate that with a young and growing population, **we are very concerned about preserving resources for future generations. Development must be done in a sociably and environmentally responsible manner. We, the Inuit, the Crees and the Quebecois insist on this.**

Finally, we are working actively to develop solutions to overcome the challenge created by the large size of our territory: telecommunications-related applications such as distance learning and telemedicine are part of our game plan for developing the region.

As I see it, Québec's future hinges on its ability to develop the North, and we have the owing abundant resources and dynamic communities to make this happen. Our government believes in our ability, so much so that Premier Bernard Landry created, for the first time in Québec's history, a ministerial portfolio dedicated to the development of Québec's North, on January 30, 2002.

Seeking to promote sustainable development and to help local communities to take charge of their future, the Québec government reached historic agreements this year with two aboriginal nations.

On February 7, 2002, we signed a major agreement with the Cree nation, known as the *Paix des braves*. Two months later, namely

on April 9th, we reached the *Sanarrutik* agreement with the Inuit of Nunavik. *Sanarrutik* is an Inuktitut word meaning “development tool”.

The Paix des braves:

The agreement signed on February 7, 2002 with the Cree nation has been described as historic both for its scope and its innovative aspects. **It has been hailed by the international community, notably through the U.N.’s Working Group on the Draft Declaration of the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples and by the efforts of the Grand Council of The Crees.**

The *Paix des Braves* is a comprehensive political and economic agreement that will last 50 years that has three chief purposes: the establishment of a nation-to-nation relationship between Québec and the Crees; the economic and community development of the Cree nation; and the efficient management of the natural resources of the Nord-du-Québec region.

(Under this accord, Québec and the Crees agree on an approach based on four principles:

- respect both for the values and traditional way of life of the Crees and for Québec’s concern for sustainable development;
- Cree self-sufficiency and control over their own development;

- establishment of a partnership relation between Québec and the Crees;
- a common will to monitor the agreement systematically and settle disputes through dialogue and mediation.)

Allow me to briefly explain some of the key features of the *Paix des Braves*.

First, under the agreement, the Québec government has undertaken to provide the Crees with the equivalent of \$70 million (close to £ 28 million) a year. The agreement also stipulates that as of 2005, this amount will be indexed taking into account the value of forest, mining and hydroelectric production in the James Bay territory. Over 50 years, this corresponds to roughly \$3.5 billion (close to £ 1.4 billion).

(The agreement institutes a new agent corporation, the Cree Development Corporation (CDC). Under a majority Cree leadership, this corporation will become a powerful tool for modern, permanent development, truly adapted to the needs of the Cree nation.)

Forestry and mining activities

As for the practice of forest activities, we and the Crees will initiate truly innovative forest development practices. Our goal is to improve efficiency and environmental protection and to harmonize forest development and management practices with traditional

Cree activities. Québec's forest regime will thus be adapted to reflect Cree concerns and our joint interest in environmental protection.

We will set up mechanisms such as the Cree-Québec Council on Forestry and the Cree mineral exploration board, both made up of representatives of the Crees and the Québec government.

Hydroelectric development

Hydroelectric development is an important aspect of *the Paix des Braves*. According to the spirit of the agreement, the development of natural resources in the James Bay territory will have to improve the well-being and prosperity of both the Cree and Québec populations.

Agreement has been reached with the Crees on carrying out two hydroelectric projects: the Eastmain 1 project and the Eastmain1-A/Rupert project. These two projects represent investments of about 4 billion dollars (£ 1.6 billion) and will lead to the creation of 10 500 direct and indirect jobs over nine years.

Moreover, Québec and the Crees have agreed to closely monitor the process with a joint mechanism for assessing the environmental impacts associated with carrying out these projects. Various studies and research will be conducted.

A Development Tool for Nunavik: Sanarrutik

From James Bay, we now head further North to the shores of Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay, where the Inuit live in Nunavik, a territory of about 500 000 km² located north of the 55th parallel. In April 2002, the Québec government signed a partnership agreement, known as *Sanarrutik*, with this nation of close to 9 400 people living in 14 northern villages.

The *Sanarrutik* agreement, signed for a period of 25 years, also rests on the relationship of trust built over the years. It illustrates the willingness to work together on forging a common vision of economic and community development, while respecting the environment.

Under this agreement, Nunavik will have the necessary tools to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The Inuit will assume greater responsibility for their own economic and community development. To that end, the Québec government has committed itself to providing regional administrations with over 360 million dollars (£ 144 million) over the next 25 years.

Let's now examine the key elements of this agreement.

The *Sanarrutik* agreement stipulates that Québec and the Inuit are to work in partnership to develop the hydroelectric, mining and tourism potential of Nunavik.

In practical terms, this means:

- a feasibility study for the construction of a power transmission line to supply electricity to the 14 northern villages;
- studies to determine Nunavik's hydroelectricity potential; in that respect, 50 million dollars (around £ 120 million) will be invested over the next 4 years to assess the hydroelectric potential of the region, currently estimated at about 7 000 MW. In the long run, these studies could pave the way for major investments on the order of \$18 billion (around £ 42 billion).
- for each hydroelectric project undertaken, the Québec government will pay the Inuit 1.25% of the value of the electricity produced.

Of course, any hydroelectric projects undertaken in Nunavik will comply with the rules and procedures for environmental and social impact assessment and protection, as required by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Inuit participation in consultation procedures is also part of the requirements of the JBNQA.

- As for the mining potential, it can be developed through underground exploration; the area is rich in copper, iron, gold and diamonds.
- Tourism will be developed through the creation of natural parks managed by the Inuit.

Finally, we have agreed to finance the realization of priority projects, in order to improve the quality and availability of public infrastructures and public services in Nunavik.

By signing the *paix des braves and Sanarrutik* agreement, Québec, the Crees and the Inuit fully realize the magnitude of the challenges that they will have to meet in the coming years. These challenges are substantial, especially considering the region's rapid demographic growth and the fact that young people account for the majority of the population; we need to create jobs, provide training and encourage local enterprises. This must be done in a manner that preserves the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of our region.

Together we are ready to take up these challenges.

Conclusion

As the only French-speaking nation in North America, Québec is very aware of the nature of the challenge faced by aboriginal nations in their efforts to protect and promote their identities and cultures in this time of change. Quebecers understand fully the survival and development stakes confronting the aboriginal nations.

The agreements that our government has entered into with the Crees and the Inuit demonstrate a real effort to achieve a balance between social fairness, economic efficiency and respect for the environment.

We believe that this strategy will prove a winner for aboriginal people and Quebecers.

Thank you.