

Making Modern Treaties Work – LCAC
Plenary 6: Language and Culture - The Foundation for the Future

Moderator: Math'ieya Alabtini, Chief Strategist, GSD Strategies, Master of Ceremonies

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Mathew Coon-Come, former Grand Chief of the Grand Council of Crees and former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations

- Languages, traditions and cultures are handed down to us from our Elders and help our understanding of modern treaties.
- “Acknowledging this truth also allows us to face the challenges we face”.
- Past policies and regulations have oppressed and disrupted the glue of language, culture and traditions. The era of modern treaties was born of these racist policies.
- Vital transformations can originate from modern treaties.
- My modern treaty originated from the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement.
 - o The negotiation between the QC government and hydro Quebec, achieved recognition and protection for language, education, health and social services, and justice.
 - o Our leaders recognized the use of the Cree language as the survival of our culture.
 - o “Our language governs our relationships with each other and the land”.
- At the age of 6, I went to a residential school for 10 years. This contributed to the loss of a language.
- Section 16 establish a Cree school board, to empower them to teach their own curriculum in their own language.
- Cree leaders who negotiated these terms are indeed graduates of the residential school system. After the government attempted to decimate the Cree language, this Cree school board was our tool to fight back. We were able to adopt our own school calendar that allows us to shape our Cree activities accordingly. The Cree’s school board’s independence is entrenched in treaty rights.
- The Cree school board inherited 3 schools facing lack of funding and a growing population.
- A school that prioritized Cree language and culture were revolutionary. And the Government understood section 16 as the ability to limit funding to conditions before the treaty negotiation. This took many legal boundaries to achieve our just budget.
- In many decades the school board invested in building new schools and inspiring youths.
- “Bring our children home” therefore it is important to bring schools to them.
- Today the Cree school board has 3 school boards, elementary & secondary, adult vocational training and post-secondary/ pre university institutions. The driving force is that the Cree school board contribute to their confidence and pride.
- “Our approach to education is based on the principle that every Cree child has the right to learn in their mother tongue”.
- This responsibility must also be taken up by the broader community to sustain our culture and ensure that it’s flourishing. Cree is spoken though is often muzzled by the introduction of French and English.
- “Land based programs and language courses are critical to the health of our communities and the survival of our culture as a nation.”

- Elders have convened to record their lessons of the Cree lexicon and bridge the gap between traditional and modern Cree culture. These lessons guide us today.
- In 2017 this framed the Cree governance with the Federal government. The 1st Act passed was the Cree Language Act. Adopting this Act provided strength and prosperity.
- We acknowledged that language is essential to survival.
- Over the last 30 years the Cree have participated in international agreements to enforce Indigenous rights. The International HR framework recognized the protection and promotion of Indigenous Languages to ensure cultural survival for self-determination.
- The Truth and Reconciliation Agreement also includes Aboriginal languages right with its respective act and commission.
- In 2019 the federal government pledged to invest \$330 million to implement the Indigenous Languages Act.
- “Language and rejuvenation efforts have begun to bear fruit but there is always more to be done”.
- Canadians have the right to be educated in their mother tongue - English and French. Indigenous Students should have the same right.
- Self-determination and sovereignty are made possible through language preservation.

Question:

N/A