Plenary 6: The Way Forward (Indigenous Leaders Panel)

Wednesday November 15, 2017 3:50PM – 4:50PM

James Arreak (Chair), Bobbie Jo Greenland-Morgan, John Jack, Dr. Abel Bosum.

James Arreak
Social and cultural policies need to reflect Inuit goals as Inuit did not transfer or give away that right to governments and NGOs.

Bobbie Jo

The younger generation is optimistic to bring about the vision of elders and ancestors who all wanted what was best and were challenged by obstacles and governments. To bring this about they must have a mutual understanding with the governments of Canada and Northwest Territories of obligations and the spirit and the intent of the modern treaty.

If these agreements aren't implemented, they are just words on paper. The younger generation is beyond frustrated that we must keep fighting since so much has been lost throughout the years. They are fighting to regain language and other things that make up their identity. As the caribou people, that is the source and the foundation of who they are. Implementation would help them achieve this.

Gwich'in and the federal government have different views of treaties. She compares land claims to a marriage in that it takes a lot of hard work to make them happen. There must be trust, respect, and agreeing to disagree. Divorce will never be an option but they don't want that. They want to work together on implementation and do their part to honour obligations.

She stated that awareness is what's needed for the average Canadian to accept the shared history.

Values:

1) Abide by traditional values
2) Inspire and encourage
3) Be positive
4) Empower others
5) Be decisive
6) Treat all with respect
7) Be open minded
8) Communicate
9) Be accountable
10) Above all be humble

These values will help us towards reconciliation as they are all about the well-being and prosperity of the modern treaty holders. We cannot change the past, we can only look forward to change the future.

John Jack

'Aht' means people. Their name means they are the people who came back.

There are incentives provided by self-government which changes one's outlook on what to do next and how to do it to provide tools to pursue one's own destiny. To do anything that we want, we need the resources to do so. They saw a lot of wealth taken off their land and are now regaining access to those resources. However, they need more tools to do the things they want to do. They need modern and traditional tools to become what we should have been – not what we were, but something better.

They have elected representatives and hereditary representation. They also have a judicial branch to be held accountable to their people and their constitution. They have strategic direction, provide community oversight and are not afraid of own source revenue because they want to get away from relying on the federal government. After all, self-reliance and independence is why they got into this in the first place. It's not just about economic sustainability but social and environmental too.

The treaty gives you the ability to create new relationships and choosing treaty is choosing active relationships – ones that are not necessarily adversarial, but constructive. Living reconciliation is living a new relationship – one that is active, reciprocal, interactive and interdependent.

Dr. Abel Bosum

Treaties are more than just compensatory contract, they are about harmony with the environment. It was the vision of leaders at the time of their treaty to set them on the path of nation building and to provide a system of self-government for communities. The initial spirit of the agreement was soon forgotten and denied by the governments and they have dealt with multiple challenges and layers of complexity.

Numerous costly legal actions and opposed projects were approved without consent or involvement. They finally concluded a governance agreement with the government of Canada to put in place their own laws and mechanisms to enforce their own laws, moving people towards a greater expression of nationhood.

Their insistence on the acknowledgment of Cree rights, Indigenous rights, and human rights was because they want their people to thrive in health and security and lay the foundation for sustainability as masters of their own homeland.

Dr. Bosum urged that Canada to adopt a legislation framework for UNDRIP so that it cannot be undone by future governments.