



Good day everyone.

I would like to share how grateful I am for the Indigenous people of this splendid Island. I am grateful for the good management of the land and resources that they were able to exert for many millennia. I am grateful for the knowledge they have had during all this time, and still today, on how to keep the land and neighboring seas alive, productive and rich.

You have figured out a way to live off the land without destroying it, a concept my community is clearly still unable to handle.

I am grateful, for the Indigenous people of this island, but also to all the Indigenous people living in the territory border by the Pacific, the Arctic and the Atlantic oceans.

I am grateful that you accept me in this room today, because I don't think I would have the skills, the patience nor the wisdom to do so if I was in your position.

A little more than 500 years ago, the first official and significant connections between Europeans and Indigenous people took place.

This should have been a great step forward for humanity. All of it. Brothers and sisters, separated during thousands of years, were reunited again, opening a multitude of possibilities of sharing knowledge, resources, skills. Enlarging everyone's possibilities, literally expanding the view of the world for both groups, multiplying the capacities of each, thus opening a path for all parties to improve their lives.

Five centuries later, one can assess quite a difference between the original potential and the current reality.

By itself, this finding is sad.

But what is even worse is the fact that no one in my community can honestly argue he or she was not aware of the situation. No one can say so today, and no one was legitimately able to say this for the last 500 years. The truth of this affirmation was, and still is, even clearer as you climb up the steps of social, politic and economic ladders.

Bishop Brother Bartolomé de Las Casas, only few years after the coming of the first Europeans to the Americas, wrote a public report dedicated to the Spanish King and tellingly titled: "A short account of the destruction of the Indies," as the Americas were then known. Allow me to read some passages.

I am persuaded that, if Your Highness had been informed of even a few of the excesses which this New World has witnessed, all of them surpassing anything that men yet have imagined even in their wildest dreams, Your Highness would not have delayed for even one moment to prevent any repetition of the atrocities which go under the name of ‘conquests’: excesses which, if no move is made to stop them, will be committed time and again, and which are of themselves iniquitous, tyrannical, contrary to natural, canon, and civil law, and are deemed wicked and are condemned and proscribed by all such legal codes.

[Further down his report, the Bishop reveals]

The reason the Christians have murdered on such a vast scale and killed anyone and everyone in their way is purely and simply greed. They have set out to line their pockets with gold and to amass private fortunes as quickly as possible so that they can then assume a status quite at odds with that into which they were born. Their insatiable greed and overweening ambition know no bounds; the land is fertile and rich, the inhabitants simple and forbearing. The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them not as brute animals – indeed, I would to God they had done and had shown them the consideration they afford their animals – so much as piles of dung in the middle of the road. They have had as little concern for their souls as for their bodies.

Sadly enough, time and distance seem to have had little effect on the way the Europeans dealt with Indigenous people and lands from that point onward.

Let’s see how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission consider the way things went since the Las Casas report.

The central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. This policy can best be described as “cultural genocide.”

[That is] to destroy the political and social institutions of the [Indigenous people]. [To do that,] land is seized, populations are forcibly transferred, and their movement is restricted.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.

[The Commission then calls for reconciliation and expounds on what it means]

Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share.



It will take many heads, hands, and hearts, working together, at all levels of society [as well as] sustained political will at all levels of government and concerted material resources [to achieve reconciliation].

Has this message been heard?

In its National Housing strategy unveiled in 2017, the Federal government says that “No relationship is more important to the Government than the one with Indigenous peoples,” and it acknowledges that “the status quo is unacceptable.”

Nevertheless, it is the only section of the Strategy that has no clear goal or objective aside from the Government’s determination “to ensure the future of housing reform is envisioned from a First Nations perspective.” Sadly, they also say this “will take time,” but we should not worry about it since the whole process “will lay the foundation for the achievement of better housing outcomes over the long term.”

That is very good to say and think if your kid is safely tucked under a blanket every night in her own bedroom, in a well-built, well-heated, well-equipped and well-maintained house.

But if you live in a world that continuously told lies to you and your ancestors for over 500 years; if you’ve learned the hard way that the deck is stacked against you, that the rules of the game are crooked, and have been for centuries, scepticism is a normal reaction.

Clearly, Indigenous people in Canada have bad housing conditions, whether they live on a reserve or anywhere else, therefore the issue should not be about who will get the handful of pocket-money the Strategy dedicates to Indigenous people, but why is it so little? Hasn’t the hardship endured by the Indigenous people been long and difficult enough?

As chair of CHRA, here is my reply to the Federal Government:

Dear Government, I am sorry to tell you, we don’t have any more time to waste, and we don’t feel like debating for another 150 years. But, if you want to do something that has any real significance, I am willing to hand over the secret mathematical formula that would allow you to figure the amount of money needed to show serious concerns and actually do something.

Now, to the representative of the federal government in the room, I suggest you take a pen and paper and note down the formula that will give you the information you need to feed you computers, your forms, your process, your consultations, your reports, your strategic plans, and all the other requirement you demand before actually helping people.

Start with 500 years of ill treatments, multiply it by millions of deaths generate by a mixture of brutal assassinations, thousands of forced removals, deliberately induced famine and diseases.



Calculate the square roots of ill-fated treaties and stolen land, make sure to take that first result and make it an exponent of the systemic racist rules conceived and implemented by the government since the beginning of Confederation.

Consider the tangent induced by the residential schools and analyze the sine and cosine of your result if you adjust it with the Indigenous kids Scoop and add the underfunding of Indigenous educational programs.

Subtract the cost of the thousands of Indigenous people put in jail for minor offences that white people never get bothered about, and make sure you do get a proper index of the losses of their mother tongue and spiritual references by hundreds of thousands of individuals over the last 100 years.

Cross reference that with the ratio of Canadian GDP derived from resources taken with no agreements with — or royalties paid to — their rightful owners.

Once you reach that stage, take the whole number of missing and murdered Indigenous women, divide it by the number of Indigenous people based on the corner of an isosceles triangle, but do not forget to consider the deprivation of care induced by the determination shown from your various Departments by spending millions of dollars in courts to oppose proper social services for kids and refusing tens of thousands of Indigenous women and their children's rights to be acknowledged as such.

You then take a quantic formula to consider that, in spite of all the reports, the studies and common knowledge anyone can pick up while walking downtown in any city in Canada, homelessness is first an Indigenous issue, and do a differential calculus based on the fact that successive Governments committed almost no new monies for 25 years towards urban and rural Indigenous people.

At this point, factor in your decision to let a large chunk of an already insufficient Indigenous housing stock seriously deteriorate, and make sure to remember to induce the data from the fact that the Indigenous population is the youngest, fastest growing demographic in the country.

You then push "Enter" on your keyboard, and you'll see the answer!

But I warn you, your machine better be mighty powerful to be able to process the figure we are talking about.

So, the message is simple: stop messing around with fractions and tiny numbers if you are serious.

Stop arguing that it's politically complex, constitutionally unclear, administratively challenging, judicially doubtful, socially unlikely, or any and other statements of the same ilk used to push back actual actions.

Urban, rural and northern Indigenous people have organised themselves for decades, would have done more, and will certainly do more if you start supporting them in any meaningful way rather than beating around the bush.



The Indigenous Caucus has come forward with a proposal called FIBI: “For Indigenous, By Indigenous.” Since the section of the Strategy that talks about Indigenous people is titled “Nothing about us, without us” a simple mind (like mine) would have expected the Canadian Government to be ecstatic when receiving such a proposal. A proposal that demonstrated the will and capacity (based on 50 years of experiences) to act swiftly and decisively to overcome the shameful situation we, as a society, have generated for Indigenous people in urban, rural and northern spaces.

Instead, you choose to say it was complicated. You choose to say it was too expensive.

CHRA, as a national organization that brings the entire sector together under its umbrella, has clearly signalled that we understand and agree that major resources should be dedicated toward urban, rural and northern Indigenous peoples. And, frankly, it’s easy to take that stand because Canada is a rich country. We can and we ought to provide the proper condition for all to live in dignity.

CHRA also backs the request of Indigenous Non-Profit providers to have their own stream of money and establish their own management structure.

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Frankly, at this point, seeing the reply we got from the Federal government, I do not know what’s the best course of action for the Caucus, and I am relieved not to be an Indigenous person, so that the responsibility won’t lie with me to define the right path ahead.

I only know that as a non-Indigenous Canadian, I am once again ashamed of my government. I also know that as an activist for the right to housing for all, and as Board member of CHRA, I commit to stand by you.

As soon to be ex-Chair of the Board, I want to tell you that, for me, no issues that we dealt with were both more important, and more disappointing, than the right to housing for Indigenous people.

And yet, no other preoccupation gave me more reasons to be motivated as Chair from an organizational point of view, since the Indigenous housing providers, you in this room, demonstrated a constant and firm willingness to act, to push forward, to show resilience and determination. The opportunity I had to see and observe this energy, this capacity to resist gave me hope. It convinced me that somewhere there is a secret survival skill, and I can’t thank you enough for it. This is where the hope lies.

So, I would like to conclude my remarks the same way I’ve started. By thanking the Indigenous people of this land, from coast to coast to coast. Thanking them because you puzzled me, with your ability to fight, to survive, to bounce back. Because this is what humanity is about. As a grand-father of four, I slowly begin to understand the statement that we do not own the land, we don’t inherit it, we only act as custodian of it for the future generations, because after all, this is all there is.

Thank you for inviting me and I truly wish you the best.