

Indigenous Caucus Speaking Notes

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I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

I would like to underline the fact that the title of this land and the resources attached to it were never surrendered. In itself, this information should help us advancing our deliberations in the right way.

I would also like to extend my salutations to:

- Elder Deborah Eisan, who made a very inspiring welcome
- Robert Byers, fellow Board member and Chair of the Caucus

And, of course, all of you for inviting me to join you here today.

I am very happy to see that what is now known as CHRA Indigenous Caucus, has grown from a meeting of a handful of Indigenous housing providers, to now including over 100 Indigenous housing providers from across Canada. I also want to thank and acknowledge the sponsors who have helped to make this Caucus the success that it is.

Merci de votre travail acharné, et du travail incessant réalisé par le Groupe de travail du Caucus autochtone. Ce travail a contribué à faire apparaître sur l'écran radar de la classe politique les besoins et les défis du logement autochtone en milieu urbain et rural.

Je tiens à vous dire qu'au cours de la dernière année, chaque rencontre que l'ACHRU a organisée avec les représentants politiques ou gouvernementaux, nous avons fait valoir les besoins du logement

autochtone en milieux urbain et rural. Nous avons partagé avec eux vos récits et vos enjeux.

Dans sa réponse à la consultation sur la stratégie nationale en matière d'habitation l'an dernier, l'ACHRU a vivement plaidé en faveur d'une stratégie d'habitation autochtone urbaine et rurale distincte. Et nous savons que vous avez tous eu des conversations semblables avec vos élus gouvernementaux respectifs.

Of course, we cannot rest on our laurels. The needs facing urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing providers and Indigenous peoples is simply too great.

We know that the End of Operating Agreements will have significant negative impacts.

We know that 1 in 15 urban and rural Indigenous people will experience homelessness at one point or another in their life, compared to 1 in 128 for the non-Indigenous population.

We know that twice as many urban Indigenous households live in sub-standard housing compared to the non-Indigenous population.

And we know that Indigenous people are targeted at a much higher rates of housing discrimination compared to non-Indigenous peoples.

In fact I want to make a very clear statement here (and you will hear it again tomorrow in front of the whole Congress and the government's officials): There can be no real National Housing Strategy if there is no Indigenous housing strategy.

If CMHC, INAC or any other body was to say otherwise, we will not only refute that, we will rebuke them with all our energy.

More, as the president of CHRA I am committing here today to work so that the Board clearly lets the Canadian government know that, however big and generous the budget dedicated to the NHS is, the NHS will mean very little to us if the means and ways to implement the Strategy does not provide significant means for the urban, rural and northern indigenous people, including by making them and their housing organizations central actors in its management and implementation.

In that regard, the budget unveiled a few weeks ago sent, at best, mixed signals.

So we must continue to put pressure on the federal government to address the needs of urban and rural Indigenous housing providers, and their tenants.

It's a matter of decency, of morality, but above all of rights. The basic human right to housing, a right that undermines most other rights if not properly implemented.

And, I would say, a right that has never been respected for the indigenous people of this territory since the beginning of urbanization and settlement. This situation must end, and it must end within our lifetime.

We shall not wait another 150 years to see that situation corrected.

The announcements in the 2017 federal Budget were a step in the right direction, but clearly more, in fact much more, must be done.

But it's not only an issue of money, the federal government can't make these plans without urban, rural and northern Indigenous people at the

table. Indigenous housing must receive proper investment, but we must also ensure that the urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing sector is consulted and represented on decision making bodies up to the highest level such as CMHC's Board of Directors.

In conclusion, I want to speak about the value of the Indigenous Caucus to CHRA.

Some facts must be acknowledged. Indigenous housing providers represent a substantial proportion of CHRA members, that situation attracts significant projects and sponsor funds. Those are facts that need to be share more broadly among CHRA members and partners.

I also believe that everyone in CHRA should be made aware that CHRA's profile is greatly enhanced by being home of the Caucus. Your presence in CHRA helps not only you, the indigenous housing providers, but also the whole of CHRA.

As the Caucus is the leading national Indigenous voice in advocating to all levels of government for policies and programs that address the specific affordable housing and support needs of Indigenous Canadians in our towns and cities, I want to say to you how proud and thankful I am as CHRA chairperson to be here now, and to be able to say that you managed to find your home in CHRA.

In itself this is an honor that makes the whole conference and the whole existence of CHRA worth being.

J'ai bien hâte d'entendre et de me joindre à vos discussions d'aujourd'hui et tout au cours du Congrès. Je vous encourage à partager vos préoccupations, vos expériences et votre expertise, et bien sûr, à faire valoir vos propositions.

I look forward to listening and joining in your discussions for the rest of today, and for the rest of this Congress. I encourage you to share your stories and experiences, to raise your issues and put forward your proposals.

CHRA and the Indigenous Caucus will continue to be successful only with your input, so thank you in advance for doing so this week.

Merci. Thank you.