

## **Open Letter**

### **June 21: NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY**

#### **MESSAGE FROM THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS QUEBEC-LABRADOR TO QUEBECERS**

In the last few months, we have all been going through an incredibly special time. No one saw this COVID-19 pandemic coming. It has turned our lives upside down and is having an impact on relations between First Nations and all Quebecers.

On the one hand, the pandemic is drifting us apart and because of it, we may not be able to welcome you to our home, as we do more and more every year, to take part in our pow wows, to take part in the celebrations of our cultures. We will not be able to welcome you to the "KWE! Meet with Indigenous Peoples" event that we are now accustomed to holding at the beginning of September. This is very unfortunate, since more and more of you are participating year after year, and it is an exceptional opportunity to get to know us better. Let's hope it is only a postponement.

On the other hand, the pandemic is bringing us closer together. Indeed, all of us, Quebecers and First Nations, have taken strong measures to protect our families, our children and our elders. We have all had to assume our responsibilities in the face of a serious threat. We shared the same concerns and we are still all on the lookout. Opportunities for sharing and collaboration among us have been created.

In addition to this already difficult context, another serious problem has resurfaced in recent weeks. Tragic circumstances have drawn everyone's attention to totally unacceptable manifestations of discrimination and racism, events that have cost the lives of human beings and that also compromise the life of a society. As we did for COVID-19, we must all face this other scourge, that of the rejection of the Other.

The message that the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador brings to the general population today on the occasion of this National Indigenous Peoples Day is an invitation to reflect on our relationship, to accept each other as we are. It is not a question of pointing fingers at each other, but rather of asking ourselves how, in concrete terms, we can improve our way of living together, in mutual respect.

There are politicians who do not dare to name things, call a spade a spade, a beaver a beaver, and who put their political interests before the improvement of living together. There are others who have more courage and are ready to act. Attempts at political cover-up must not prevent citizens, individually and collectively, from seeing reality in the face and trying to correct what is wrong. That is how we will be able, together, to convince politicians to take their responsibilities, to take seriously the recommendations to fight discrimination and racism presented to them by the commissions they themselves have mandated, to stop being afraid of words, and even more so to take the actions that are necessary.

When the next opportunity presents itself, the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador hopes that Quebecers and First Nations members will have much to say to each other for the benefit of respectful and progressive mutual relations.

In Peace and Friendship,

Ghislain Picard  
Chief of the AFNQL