



Assemblée des Premières Nations Québec–Labrador

250, Place Chef Michel Laveau, bureau 201
Wendake (Québec) G0A 4V0
Tél. : 418-842-5020 • Téléc. : 418-842-2660
www.apnql-afnql.com

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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION

SYSTEMIC RACISM TOWARDS FIRST NATIONS: ALSO THE REALITY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF TERRITORIES AND RESOURCES

Wendake, October 8, 2020 – While all eyes are rightly focused on the deplorable context surrounding the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan, another demonstration of systemic racism is currently affecting the Anicinape Nation. This time, it is the denial of First Nations' territorial rights, another form of institutional discrimination against Indigenous peoples, denounces the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL).

The Anicinape Nation is calling for a complete moratorium on moose hunting on its unceded ancestral territory. Faced with the Quebec government's refusal to authorize this moratorium, roadblocks have been erected in the La Vérendrye wildlife reserve to prevent hunters from passing through. Yesterday, the Quebec Superior Court granted a provisional injunction to the Petawaga zec, part of the La Vérendrye wildlife reserve.

"The injunction granted yesterday on the unceded traditional territory of the Anicinape Nation runs the risk of being another rude awakening for the Quebec government", declared the Chief of the AFNQL, Ghislain Picard, reminding that the Anicinape Nation holds ancestral rights, including an unextinguished ancestral title, on the entire territory of the wildlife reserve.

The citizen and political mobilization following the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan on September 28th was, in the eyes of the Grand Chief of the Atikamekw Nation, Constant Awashish, a "wake-up call" for the people of Quebec, but especially for the government of François Legault. "In spite of the claims of the Quebec government, which believes that it is acting to the satisfaction of the First Nations Chiefs, it must be recognized that it will take more to build trust for the establishment of a true political relationship, since the vast majority of Chiefs believe that the time for compromise is coming to an end," said Chief Picard.

Lessons from the "railway" crisis

What is happening right now is reminiscent of the recent so-called "railway" crisis affecting the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The Anicinape Nation, like a majority of First Nations in Quebec, holds ancestral rights over unceded traditional territories.

"In the aftermath of the railway crisis, where the First Nations of the country were called upon, once again, to mobilize in support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, naivety, if not ignorance, made Premier Legault say that the problem was unique to British Columbia, that it could not happen in Quebec. He is wrong and I hope we have learned some lessons from what happened last winter." notes Chief Picard.

Moose hunting is at the heart of the culture and identity of the Anicinape Nation and all First Nations in Quebec. The protection of moose is a collective duty to ensure the vitality and sustainability of culture and traditions. Government leniency in this file has direct impacts on the rights of the Anicinapek, which are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and protected by Canadian and international law.

The UN Declaration

One year ago today (October 8, 2019), the National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion submitted by Québec Solidaire urging the Government of Quebec to sit down with First Nations leaders to negotiate the terms of implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. According to recent statements by both Premier Legault and the Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs, it appears that the Quebec government does not intend to follow up on this motion.

After the sad events at the Joliette hospital, the AFNQL demands that the government act immediately to protect the territorial rights of the Anicinapek people. Otherwise, for Chiefs who are trying to engage the Quebec government in a political dialogue based on good faith, Quebec will give another example of the systemic racism that First Nations have been paying the price for too long.

"The anger in our hearts is still very much alive following the tragic death of Joyce Echaquan. I am convinced that I am not alone. The anger in the tears of Joyce's children was easily perceptible at her funeral. Premier Legault has an opportunity today to take concrete action on his promises to act against racism towards our people. The test of sincerity is now," stated Ghislain Picard.

In conclusion, while the Quebec government is primarily targeted by this issue, the AFNQL urges the federal government to assume its responsibilities as well. It is its duty to intervene now.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is the regional political organization that brings together the 43 Chiefs of the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador. Follow the AFNQL on Twitter @APNQL

Source:

Alain Garon, agaron@apnql.com

Communications Advisor

Cell.: 418 254-4620