

*Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Speaking Notes – Tuesday June 10, 2008
Tungasuvvingat Inuit Gathering*

June 11th 2008 will be a day in which we, as Inuit and as aboriginal people, can take some comfort.

Comfort that the sad history and sad legacy of abuse at schools attended by Inuit and other aboriginal students will be fully and forcefully exposed to the public eye.

Comfort that the various efforts in the past to deny, minimize or rationalize that abuse will be forever discredited.

Comfort that the accountability of the Government of Canada will be acknowledged and that an apology will be given.

More importantly, June 11th will be a day of remembrance and reflection.

Remembrance of all those who suffered as direct victims of often horrific abuse.

Remembrance of all those who suffered pain from a distance ... parents and grandparents and extended families and whole communities.

Remembrance of all of us who have ever been taught or made to feel shame or guilt for who and what we are.

Remembrance of those who had the particular burden --- the loneliness and bewilderment --- of suffering in silence.

Remembrance of those who have been able to break the cycle of abuse and spare their children what they faced themselves.

Remembrance of those overwhelmed by abuse, and denied forever the opportunity for happy and productive lives.

Remembrance of those who first spoke out about the abuse, and demanded redress.

Remembrance, above all, of those victims not here to witness this apology.

And, finally, June 11th will be a day of reflection.

Reflection that, in this world, the truth can be hidden and obstructed, sometimes very effectively and for a long time, but rarely bottled up forever.

Reflection that the courage and determination of key individuals and small organizations can have huge impacts.

Reflection that compassion and gentleness can survive even in the most hostile of environments.

And, above all, reflection that the Inuit and other aboriginal peoples of Canada, whatever the struggles and oppressions and injustices of history, are here today ... and we will be here tomorrow.



*Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Speech in House of Commons – Wednesday June 11, 2008
National Apology to Aboriginal Students attending Residential Schools*

Mr. Prime Minister...

Nakurmiik / Inuktitut Statement

Mr. Prime Minister, first I spoke in my Inuit language because I wanted to illustrate to you that our language and culture is still strong.

And Mr. Prime Minister, I have to face you to say this because it comes from the bottom of my heart.

It took great courage for you to express your sorrow, and apology, to our people. To the Inuit, to First Nations, and to Métis. And we thank you for it. We thank you very much.

I am one of these people that have dreamed for this day. And there have been times in this long journey when I despaired that this would never happen. But after listening to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of the political parties, I am filled with hope and compassion for my fellow Aboriginal Canadians as I stand among them here with you and your fellow ministers today.

I am also filled with optimism that this action by the government of Canada and the generosity in the words chosen to convey this apology will help us all mark the end of this dark period in our collective history as a nation.

Let us not be lulled into an impression that when the sun rises tomorrow morning the pain and scars will miraculously be gone. They won't. But a new day has dawned, a new day heralded by a commitment to reconciliation, and building a new relationship with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations.

Let us now join forces with a common goal of working together to ensure that this apology opens the door to a new chapter in our lives as Aboriginal peoples and in our place in Canada.

There is much hard work to be done. We need the help and support of all thoughtful Canadians and our governments to re-build strong, healthy families and communities.

This can only be achieved when dignity, confidence and respect for traditional values and human rights once again become part of our daily lives and are mirrored in our relationships with governments and other Canadians.

I stand here, today, ready to work with you – as Inuit always done - to craft new solutions and new arrangements based on mutual respect and mutual responsibility.

Thank you, and may wisdom and compassion guide our efforts.

Thank you very much.



*Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Speaking Notes – Wednesday June 11, 2008
Reading Room Reception following Apology
Centre Block, Parliament Hill*

Inuktitut Statement

This has been a remarkable day for the First Peoples of Canada.

This has been a remarkable day for Canada.

What does it mean to be an aboriginal ? What does it mean to be Inuit ?

I think today Canadians from coast to coast to coast know more about what that means.

We've been down a long journey together. As a nation, right now, we're doing the heavy lifting. We're the grinders going into the corners and taking the checks now – and I know the Prime Minister can understand hockey metaphors.

Today's apology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are the difficult work we are doing as a nation. We have to do this work together if we are to mature as a nation.

Thank you for today.

For Inuit, it means that our four Inuit regions – the Inuvialuit Region, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut – can move forward in a big way regarding substantial social and emotional progress.

There are 53 Inuit communities spread out in the largest part of Canada.

I want you to know that this apology will help entire communities in their healing process. The Residential schools issue has skipped from generation to generation.

The percentage of Inuit who graduate from high school is only 16 percent compared to 63 percent for the rest of Canada..... 16 percent compared to 63 percent....

Today's apology will help close that gap.

Why?

Because some of the parents of our children are afraid to send their children to school, because for them “the school” is something very very bad. Something fearful.

Now, Inuit can use this apology to work not only with Inuit youth, but with parents, to close that gap in education.

The education gap is only one gap we have to close.

We have identified the number one health issue in the Arctic among Inuit.

It’s mental health.

We need to close this gap, and this apology will do a lot of good towards that.

Lastly, as the national Inuit leader, I must ask Canada to reconsider the exclusion of the Nunatsiavut – Labrador - Inuit from the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Surely Prime Minister, the sentiments expressed here today are being offered to all Aboriginal people throughout Canada who suffered and survived the residential school system.

Thank you again Prime Minister, and to Party Leaders, for coming together today, to leave aside the usual business of this House, and doing some heavy lifting.

Let’s make a greater Canada together.

Speaking Notes
Mary Simon
President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
June 12, 2008
Senate of Canada
Committee of the Whole
Response to Apology on Residential Schools

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate

Yesterday's events will go down in history.

The Inuit of Canada, whose families, communities and culture have been shattered by the residential school system, received this apology with great relief.

Today is not the time for looking back. As I said yesterday in the House of Commons, a new day has dawned. Today we should together look forward.

I woke up this morning with a new sense of optimism.

My first thoughts were of old battles – some won and some lost. Your colleague, Senator Watt and I were old warriors together. Some 35 years ago we fought Goliath and achieved the historic James Bay and Northern Quebec land claims agreement. And for many years we Inuit have watched Senator Adams speak in this Chamber on our behalf. Thank you Charlie. Thank you Willie.

Thank you also for including Inuktitut as an official language in the Senate this fall as a pilot project.

We were young and full of anger. But we also had a vision infused by what our people had been and what we knew they would be again.

And here we are today – certainly older – and wiser. I know that change takes time, energy and patience. Heaven knows we have been patient.

Now I am here to tell you – **this is our time**.

The magnitude of yesterday's historic apology and request for forgiveness will be measured in the future actions of government. So much of our past relationship with governments has been diminished by unfilled promises.

All Inuit in positions of authority and influence now have the responsibility to build on this offer of a new relationship.

Government itself now has the responsibility to dedicate energy and creativity in framing this new relationship with us based on respect for who we are, our traditions, our history, language and culture.

We must be 'in the room', working together with Government to build this new relationship. Gone are the days when policy or legislative initiatives are "invoked for us".

I sincerely hope that is what the Prime Minister's message yesterday was all about.

The Prime Minister on behalf of Canada and Canadians also asked us for forgiveness.

As individuals we will all make our own choice in that regard.

As leader of the organization representing the Inuit of Canada, I believe that real and lasting forgiveness must be earned. It will only be forthcoming when it is clear that government is willing to act.

Yesterday the Prime Minister said: "The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country."

Restoring dignity, self-worth, confidence and hope for the future will be no easy task. It will be more difficult for the Inuit of Nunatsiavut who attended residential schools-suffered the same indignities as other victims of that cruel system-and yet are excluded from the Settlement Agreement-unjustly so.

I have asked the Prime Minister yesterday to reconsider this decision. Allow these Inuit victims to embrace this apology fully. Support their healing as well. I call upon you as Senators, and the spirit of human justice that reigns in this Chamber to prevail. Let my people of Nunatsiavut into the healing process. Let them into the Settlement Agreement

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be an important process for supporting the restoration of our dignity and self-worth but it does not end there.

Canada must commit to the development and support of policies and long term programs that are needed to restore our families and rebuild our sense of community and our place in Canada.

In the case of Inuit, we are well positioned to do just that. All our Inuit regions have achieved comprehensive modern-day land claims agreements. These are Constitutionally- protected treaties between Inuit and the Government of Canada and have formed the basis of a foundation relationship with the Government of Canada

We also live in a region of Canada which is at the epicenter of many of Canada's immediate and looming challenges - Climate change, hydrocarbon development and sovereignty to name the most evident.

Meeting and addressing these challenges will take commitment, human and financial resources. It will require that we all take responsibility to contribute what we can, individually and collectively.

We need robust and sustainable northern communities.

We need a healthy, confident, and educated Inuit population.

We need to re-invigorate our language and traditions.

Let us now move forward together.

I repeat what I said yesterday. I stand ready to work honestly and energetically with government.

I will be watching the actions of Government very closely.

Today and tomorrow let us together as First Peoples of this great Country - arm in arm with you, the legislators of Canada, rejoice.

Rest during this weekend. Be assured the work starts next week. But we can say that work will begin together with you in collaboration and in the spirit of forging a future for all of us – together.