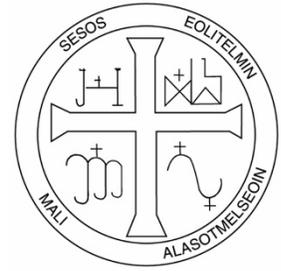


*Sante' Mawioimi*

*Mi'kmaq Grand Council*

*7 Districts of Mi'kma'ki ~ Land of the Mi'kmaq*



March 24, 2020,

### Grand Chief Address to Mi'kmaw of the 7 Districts

The Mi'kmaq Grand Council has participated in various meetings over the last few weeks, monitoring all the work our Mi'kmaw Chiefs are doing as we work collaboratively to navigate through this pandemic. This life altering global trauma resembles some of the many historic battles the Indigenous people have faced. During Pre-contact, the Mi'kmaq lived simple yet structured lives where everyone in the encampments had a job to do for the success of the community as a whole. Men, women and children had a role, and each one was just as important. European contact was a huge disruption to the Mi'kmaq way of life, because of the sickness it brought. Other examples of hardships include: the *Indian Act* it challenged our sovereignty, bounties on scalps enacted by Cornwallis were put in place to eradicate us, residential schools, and the 60's scoop was another way to assimilate us, and finally centralization which was used to strip us from our traditional territory. All these things were designed and implemented as a way to rid the "Indian" problem. **Yet we are still here**, and we still stand strong as a Nation.

As Grand Chief, I want to share these hardship examples, remind our people of all the things we survived, and that our ancestor's stories are proof of our resilience. We have been here for more than 10,000 years, and we will continue to be here if we follow the teachings of our ancestors. We all have roles and responsibilities and now is the time to do your part in your communities. **We need to work together and protect each other from the outside influences of this sickness. Our elders are our knowledge keepers, and they hold wisdom about our culture and language that will be passed on to the younger generations; so, we must make sure we do everything we can to protect them.**

Canadian statistics show Indigenous people across this country have the highest numbers when looking at children in care and foster homes, incarcerations, missing and murdered Indigenous women, men and girls. Recently we've seen that our people have the highest numbers in below the poverty line. These social issues put us in the most vulnerable position when it comes to combating the diseases from foreign lands. **The potential devastation to our Mi'kmaw Nation is a serious threat. It is vital that we do all we can together to ensure we lessen the impact of this sickness across the 7 districts of Mi'kma'ki.**

I want our people to look to the knowledge within our history, reinforce the traditions, culture, beliefs, and language that we have been given by our ancestors. It is those things that will strengthen us because it is those things that make us who we are. I want to see people respect our creator, respect mother earth, and all her creations including this virus. In saying this, **I want to see**

**the Mi'kmaw Nation to take coronavirus seriously and follow the proper precautions outlined by health officials to keep it out of our communities and Nation.**

This may be a scary time but we have seen and endured horrific times together in the past; and we will continue to do it again. I want to share a message of strength and hope to our people that highlights what we have **overcome**. During this time, we must hold close our Mi'kmaw identity, and use this time we have together in our homes to teach our own children about our history, educate them on Grand Council, teach them about our St. Anne Mission, and tell them about the important roles everyone plays in the community. Talk to your children about their role as an important part of our future. It's important also that explain why there is no school, why they could not enjoy their March break, and also why playing with their friends is not possible at this time. I feel it is important we provide our youth with reassurance that everything will be okay.

In the last eight months since becoming Kji Saqmaw, one of my main goals is to bring the Mi'kmaw Nation together. I want everyone to know that our people traditionally came together in times of difficulty and united as one, just like we are doing now, so be proud, you are playing your role as a Mi'kmaq and community member across our great land. Please know, I am keeping all of the Mi'kmaq Nation and my people in my prayers. The Grand Council believes in keeping the faith and protecting our Nation.

In closing, I want to say that Our Traditional Mi'kmaw Government "Sante Ma'wiomi" support the efforts of our elected leaders and our Provincial Counterparts in their fight against COVID-19 and we want to thank them for everything they are doing to protect our Nation. Msit Nokma'q!

Wela'liog,



Kji Saqmaw Norman Sylliboy Sr.

