



LET'S TALK GOVERNANCE

ECHOES FROM THE SYMPOSIUM



We make laws to fulfill our responsibilities, to address our needs and our priorities. Any discussion on Mi'gmaq self-government needs to begin within Mi'gmaq communities. It comes from our relationship with the land, the water, and all living things that inhabit Gespe'gewa'gi. Nothing is more important for the future of our community than self-determination to decide what we need and what we want for future generations," said Chief Scott Martin at his opening remarks of the Let's Talk Governance Symposium on November 15th and 16th held in Listuguj.

The event was attended by nearly 120 people, including directors from different LMG departments, youth, and Elders as well as other organizations. The ongoing conversation about the need for self-government in First Nation communities is a constant reminder of the colonial enclosure called the Indian Act which restricts First Nations from freely governing themselves.

Indigenous nations on this continent, including the Mi'gmaq, have experience in governance. We have developed civilizations, languages, social structures, economies, worldviews, and all

that is connected to the lands and waters in our territories. As Chief Scott said, the understanding of our relationship with the spiritual world and all living beings that inhabit Gespe'gewa'gi is reflected in the teachings, offerings, prayers, and songs that we still practice.

Colonization has disrupted and weakened our development since the imposition in 1876, of the Indian Act, obstructing our right to continue our way of governance. We never lost or extinguished that right and for the last 30 years Listuguj started to question that system and began upholding our rights. Despite the Indian Act we developed and implemented the Salmon Law, the Lobster Law, the Moose Protocol, Ranger Law, etc, and we are expanding our aspiration for self-government.

The new generations are demanding to dismantle what is not good for us and participants at the Let's Talk Governance spoke about our challenges and our aspirations. The symposium started by lighting a Sacred Fire, making offerings, prayers, and singing songs on an early chilly morning.

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This was followed by a presentation, -considered for many as an “eye-opener”- by Satsan George, president of the Centre for First Nations Governance and Hereditary Chief and speaker for the Wet’suwet’en Nation, BC.

Chief Satsan has over 40 years of working towards recognition and respect for the inherent right to self-government in the courts, classrooms, and communities. This was his third visit to Gespe’gewa’gi. “Your nation has a legacy of resistance, and we can look at that and ask, what are we fighting for? We found five pillars of the inherent right to self-government that resonate here and across the country: 1: our people, rebuild health and wellness, bring back culture, language, and identity. 2: sacred homeland given to us by the Creator and fulfill our obligation to be responsible and look out for it. 3: put our law in place for the land and our people, 4: reclaim our governance system, 5: resources capacity to govern our lands and ourselves,” he explained during his presentation.

Attendants at the symposium were able to participate in workshops and interact with panels on various topics like “Connecting Mi’gmaq Spirituality to Good Governance” held by Traditional Knowledge holders Bernard Jerome, Glenda Labillois, and Christine Metallic.

In the panel “Challenges to Self-Governance: Addressing Colonial Legacies”, Social Services Director Tanya Barnaby; Associate-Director of Education Amy Chamberlin; and Health Director Donna Metallic spoke about the difficulties of working with laws and systems imposed on us by the province or the federal government. Amy Chamberlin presented her research about the history and impact of the Indian Day School in Listuguj.

The youth participation was refreshing and strongly applauded. Under the theme “Revitalizing Governance through Storytelling”, Killa Atencio, spoken word artist, Emma Metallic, published author, and Ali Barnaby, of the “Rekindling our Governance” project, shared their perspective, experience, and pointed out that their source of inspiration for their work are the stories, language, and identity.

Mi’gmaq lawyer, Naiomi Metallic, via the internet facilitated the workshop “Mi’gmaq Law and Governance” and LMG legal counsel Zach Davis did a presentation on “Self-Governance.”

Mask maker artist Duane Isaac, basket maker Mary-Beth Wysote, and drum maker Christine Metallic showcased their work and explained their inspiration as artists.

The two-day event and the many conversations had sparked renewed interest to pursue the conversation on self-governance.



1. People - revitalize our language, pride
 - practice cultural knowledge teaching / kolos
 - restore the balance that was disconnected

2. Land - Reclaim back lands / unceded territory
 - Protect the land, ecosystems, medicinal
 - Put our flags on it
 - Use the resources for our own sustainability

3. Law + jurisdiction - Develop laws that are based on traditional ways of knowing + being
 - less punitive - more conciliatory - restorative approach - Apigisitoan

4. - Governance system - No more election
 - hard memberships
 - Create our identities as Mi'gmaq

5. Resources - Authority to develop our own resources based on the needs
 - Restore balance / Atukalimik
 - Prevent leakage

3.6.2