

Speaking Notes for Chief Matthew Kakekaspan, Fort Severn First Nation
Polar Bear Meeting
Quebec City

This is a historic meeting. Today, the Inuit and the Cree have gathered for the first time to discuss how best to manage the polar bear which is facing pressure from climate change caused largely by people in the cities and towns in the south. The Inuit and the Cree did not create this problem. Like the polar bear, our people are facing pressures because of climate change. Make no mistake if the polar bear cannot survive on our traditional lands, the Cree will not be able to survive either.

Our Elders, hunters and trappers have seen pressures on the caribou, sturgeon and other wildlife which we share our traditional territories. Scientists, bureaucrats and their political masters will tell you that they are the best ones to manage the polar bear. They will try to tell us that their knowledge is superior to the traditional knowledge of the Elders, the hunters, trappers and others in our communities who understand how to sustainably harvest the Land. However, the scientists, the bureaucrats and their political masters are wrong. The Inuit and the Cree have been managing our land since Time Immemorial. If the scientists do not believe me, they should examine the Hudson Bay Company archives. We managed the hunt even when Hudson Company complained that they wanted us to bring in more furs that our traditional lands could support.

Since I became Chief of Fort Severn Cree, I have grown concerned that the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has showed little interest in sharing the management of the bear with my first nation. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources ignores our Treaty rights and ignores our Inherent rights. Government officials pay lip

service to our treaty and inherent rights but they continue to act as if the Cree people do not exist and do not have any constitutionally entrenched rights of self-determination. I have no doubt that if we Cree and Inuit peoples cannot come together today and develop a common strategy the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources will say that they can speak for the Cree and the Inuit on this and other matters. Let me be clear, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources does not speak for the Cree in this or any other matter on the regional, national or international stage. If Ontario is invited to a meeting to discuss polar bear strategy, then Fort Severn Cree First Nation demand a seat at the table for all regional, national and international gatherings to discuss the future of the polar bear. We base this demand on our Treaty and Inherent Rights re-affirmed in the Canadian Constitution.

The Inuit and we Cree understand why this meeting was called. This issue cannot be solved by biologists who *think* they are the only ones who know the bear. The actions of Biologists, the environmental lobby and the governments which they serve have done much to undermine our ability as Aboriginal peoples to manage the hunt and our ability to manage our traditional lands. The biologists and environmentalists have recommended rules to their governments that have ignored the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of our Elders, hunters and trappers. The biologists, the environmental lobby and the governments which they serve have systematically disempowered our communities. And we all know what happens when young hunters become disempowered. They get angry. They get frustrated and they strike out in the only way they can. The only way to ensure that our grandchildren and their grandchildren will see polar bears on our traditional lands is if the Inuit and Cree are

acknowledged by all levels of government to manage and are provided with the resources to manage them. I am calling on the Inuit and the Cree to come together to create a Polar Bear Strategy Circle. I am calling on Quebec and Ontario to fund our Polar Bear Strategy Circle where we as Aboriginal People can meet and discuss the best way to protect the bear, manage our hunt and protect our Treaty and Inherent Rights. I am not talking about a one day meeting in the south. The survival of the polar bear requires that Inuit and Cree work together over time to reassert our traditional rights to co-manage our traditional territories.

Make no mistake, biologists, environmentalists and government officials cannot save the polar bear from their offices in the cities. They can only make a bad situation for the polar bear worse. If you care about the bear, you need the Inuit and Cree at the table. Without Inuit and Cree voices, without our knowledge, without our presence at the decision-making process, the polar bear will not survive.