

Chief Davey Bobbish
Presentation on BAPE Hearings On Uranium
Chisasibi, Quebec
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Waachiyaa! My name is Chief Davey Bobbish of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi. I would like to welcome you all, the BAPE Commission, the presenters, and everyone who has an interest on the subject of uranium. I would like to thank all those who have participated in the previous stages of this commission. I'm sure all of you understand why we need to state our positions on a very important issue on such as the one we are discussing today.

I, Davey Bobbish, as the Chief and the chief representative of my Council, elected by the people of Chisasibi, hereby make this declaration on their behalf, in one syllable – “No!”. In our Eeyou language, that's “Ni-mah”. You can make me say it in every other language; but our answer will be the same. As the Chief and leader of this community, Uranium is not an answer to any of my own questions to “How can I help my people live better or improve their lives?” It is not my idea of how I want to see my community develop as a self-autonomous and prosperous community.

Chisasibi, which we call and means “The Great River” in our language, originates from many other sources of water from rivers, streams from lakes upstream that collect the sediment and debris and brings everything from far and wide into what we see as our river. With the James Bay Project, the Rupert River diversion and other projects from a few years ago, the impact on our river is far greater than before. The water flow of our river’s current has drastically increased. Our river hardly freezes anymore in the winter. Contamination of any kind that occurs upstream, even in other parts of the watershed, will undoubtedly and ultimately manage to find its way into our homes. This is the scariest part for our community members. Our drinking water station is based right at our riverbank. We cannot afford to have any potential disasters, natural or man-made – for example, oil spill, chemical, or any other - upriver whatsoever. Even salt-water vegetation (e.g. eel-grass) that migrant geese, brant, ducks and other waterfowl depend on has been drastically reduced or no longer grows out in the bay. Even with this, we have only touch on some of our community concerns.

As a people, as a nation, we, our fathers and grandfathers have fought many fights in the past. They fought a good fight. Every fight

we fought, every promise we were promised, when we were told that it was in “our best interest, in the best interest of the greater good of our Nation and country.” This fight is now about fighting for those who cannot speak for themselves, the countless generations of Eeyou and their brothers and sisters from across this land that will be affected long after we ourselves have taken our last breath.

I have listened and I have heard our Elders talk about this land and surrounding rivers, the tributaries, the lakes, this life, a life so beautiful in a land of abundance and richness that one had even fondly referred to it as “Our Garden.” These words reflect our elders’ true feelings and their relationship they had, and continue to have, with this God-given gift we know as and proudly call “Eeyou Istchee.” This richness, as our elders understood it, could never be measured in terms of money. They tell us that we cannot and should not always try to put a dollar equivalency on everything we see. They have often said that the land will still remain even after the last dollar has been spent. Our people have always depended on this land, rivers and lakes for their daily sustenance. Living on this land we know was not always easy, but it was our way of life. This is our way of life. Yes, many will probably argue that we have moved to a wage economy; however, the fact remains that many of our people are still living off the land today and

still very dependent on the food it provides. It comforts us to know that we can still rely on it for the many other good things that help us in our daily lives.

Chisasibi, as a community, has seen many changes in a very short time frame and we have sacrificed a lot over the years. The Eeyou of Chisasibi are NOT anti-development. We are just against things we know will not help improve our lives. They can tell you that our community, Chisasibi, have seen more than its fair share of adverse effects from modern development. We have been trampled on; we have been displaced; we have been relocated to make way for the ever-triumphant marches of the much heralded so-called development of “the projects of the centuries”. For example, every winter, our people cannot enjoy staying or hunt peacefully at their hunting cabins or traplines because of the fear of stray bullets from sport hunters. We were never informed that our traplines would turn into unsafe places for what was a place of total comfort and peace.

As it always seems to happen, our traditional territory is once again - with uranium development - a possible target of yet another threat. This threat, this time, promises to affect not only this generation, but those countless lives yet unborn by the possible

damaging effects of radiation; which may destroy lives even before they are born. No, we are not just talking about human lives here. We are talking about the whole environment, every animal, every plant, water, and yes, even the air we breathe. How uneducated does one has to be to not understand what the underlying effects and dire consequences are from radiation, radon gas, and others equally destructive through contact, even indirectly?

The Eeyou have learned much previously about the effects of mercury poisoning and how much it can adversely affect the lives of those who depended on fish, birds and other wildlife. We were told that we couldn't eat the fish and the loons we depended on from our rivers and lakes because of the adverse and cumulative effects on the food chain by methylmercury. We were warned that we would have to wait up to 20 or more years before we could consume it again as part of our regular diet. Uranium, on the other hand will have far more serious and permanent consequences. Uranium will affect not just the people individually, but will even go as far as altering their cellular and gene structures, forever changing them. The most frightening scenario is that each part of the food chain will be affected or altered by the development of uranium in our territory. This is the very food we all depend on, the food we have depended on for thousands and

thousands of years. No one wants to have this uncertainty every time they take a bite out of their food.

Uranium is not part of our language; it never was part of our culture. You may correct me if I'm wrong, was it ever part of anybody's culture? This matter is so foreign to us that we can only call it "the bad rock". What lessons have we learned from events such as Chernobyl? Hiroshima? And more recently, Fukushima? Yes, you may say this will never happen here. Not in my back yard. Yet, strange things have happened, man-made or freaks of nature. We were informed by health experts that uranium takes millions of years to reach its harmless state. Even if we could, I am quite certain that we would not want to wait to find out how it has affected our children in the future.

We have many, many questions about all the possible effects of uranium and its exploitation. There are many issues that we have to consider, such as public health and safety; contamination of land and water; radioactive tailings; transportation of radioactive material; the effects on our traditional traplines; the effects on birds, animals, fish and plants; effects on the rivers and lakes we depend on.

Then, there are other questions that touch on our Eeyou rights which are enshrined in the JBNQA and other agreements, legal documents, including the Constitution that have to be considered. It is stated very clearly in our agreements that a full consultation is required before any development is undertaken within our traditional hunting territories. Social acceptability has to be achieved. In this case, we all know that Crees are adamantly against uranium and other equally destructive forms of development.

I have stated earlier that Chisasibi has seen many changes and have sacrificed a lot within a very short period of time. We have managed to live with the encroachment of our lands by fur traders; the establishment of and the physical and sexual abuses resulting thereafter from the residential schools; the community and personal sacrifices for the massive hydro-electricity development; which was done in the name of the future needs and the greater good of general society and which took place in our lands, rivers and lakes. Today, our people are still dealing with the intergenerational trauma from the past events and experiences.

In closing, I want to say this: As a leader and Chief of this community, you already know what my views of uranium exploitation and development in our traditional territory, our traplines, and the land that our people and forefathers have depended on, and still depend on for their livelihood. My answer is very clear. We stand and will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our brothers and sisters from the Cree Nation and other first nations, and all our other brothers and sisters from elsewhere. We will stand united against this clear and perceived threat against our humanity and our environment. We have an obligation and responsibility to fulfil to our future generations and especially to those who cannot speak for themselves. To uranium and any future development in Eeyou Istchee, especially Chisasibi hunting territories and traplines - on behalf of our Council; our community; our future generations, and more importantly, on behalf of those Elders who have passed on and had provided us with the guidance on how to take care of as the stewards of what they referred to as “The Garden” - I have to declare my answer once again with a resounding **NO!**

I thank you for your time and for choosing Chisasibi as one of locations for this important commission. I know each one of us still have some monumental tasks ahead of us. I am certain that each of us will proceed with all necessary caution and a clear conscience on this

controversial subject. I wish you all the best, and especially to all the people who have worked hard, and continue to work hard, to bring us this BAPE Commission Hearings and bringing the issue of uranium to the forefront. Waachiyaa!