

1975

DRAFT
DENE DECLARATION
FOR DISCUSSION
PURPOSES ONLY

Contents:

1. Historical Introduction
2. Examples of Specific Declarations
 - (a) Declaration on Development
 - (b) Declaration on role of native organizations
 - (c) Statement on strategy and organizing

Introduction

1. The situation, historically and today, has been to the disadvantage of the Dene Nation. Industry and government have said one thing to the people and done another. It is time for us to speak the truth.
2. Take, for example, the Treaties. The Indian people signed the Treaties in good faith, believing them to be no more than treaties of peace and friendship. When we had doubts and refused to sign, the Government was not above forging signatures. Since that time the Government has said that the Treaties were land cession treaties, and absurdly insisted that we sold our land for \$5 a year each.
3. Our land, first slowly and now more rapidly, has been overrun by explorers, traders, developers and government officials. They are the agents of a European system, and they have come to exploit the land and resources for the betterment of the few who control industry and big business. The nature of the industrial culture that increasingly penetrates the North is such that a few will profit while the majority of the people, whether native or white, are kept powerless.
4. In the beginning our people saw little harm in letting the early explorers and traders come to the North, for the goods that they brought somewhat compensated for their being here. But more and more people came. The level of interference with the old ways increased. We can no longer let things go on because very shortly we will not be able to live off the land as we have from time immemorial.

5. We no longer have any alternative but to take over control of developments in the North. We must have the right to decide not only when development occurs, but what kind of development takes place and for whose benefit.

6. Since the coming of the whiteman, and industrial development, the Dene have been encouraged to join in his system of competition. But this nation has withstood the pressure. We have not adopted this alien system that puts one person against another because we have our own ways of sharing wealth and resources. Always we have taken care of the young, the old and the disadvantaged. We intend to maintain our sharing and egalitarian society.

7. We are a nation, a people with a long history and a whole culture, a culture which has survived the invasion of our land. Although this is a fact of which all of us are aware - since we are the people of the Dene nation - we still must make this statement because others do not know or admit of our existence as a nation.

8. We make this statement because some of our young, being educated in a foreign educational system, are getting confused and are unaware of how they can contribute to our people. Also, some of our people who are becoming involved with industry and government are slowly coming to believe in their ways and are forgetting where they came from. They need clear direction.

9. We have lost control of our own lands. The present legal system, the Territorial and Federal Government systems, the educational system, the industrial economy - all are foreign and oppressive in their present forms. Real power lies with a handful of large companies who operate with the full co-operation of both the Territorial and Federal governments.

10. These same companies operate in other parts of the world, in the poor countries known as the Third World. The companies go in and exploit the non-renewable resources of these countries

to serve the purpose of making profits for themselves and providing resources to the already rich and developed countries. Some of the people in the poor country get jobs, but they are locked into a factory system and a consumer society where they are powerless and where they have to strive to better themselves as individuals rather than work for the benefit of the masses of people.

11. There are many lessons for the Dene to learn from the development of the Third World countries. As colonies of the imperial powers, they everywhere failed to develop. Their prospects necessarily improved to the extent that they were successful in gaining independence. But even after formal political independence, many have had trouble developing because the power of the so-called multinational corporations, with their base in a small number of highly developed industrial societies, has denied their genuine economic independence. Only with tremendous effort from the people can an economy independent from outside controls be built.
12. Our situation in the North is the same as that of the peoples of the Third World who were until recently subjugated. As aboriginal people within a white society, we are a part of the Fourth World. We have been made Canadians by decree and not by our free choice.
13. Understandably our first choice would be to be once again a sovereign people. But we are realistic and know the whiteman is powerful. At the same time, we native people are still the majority within the North. We are in a unique situation in North America and we should take advantage of our situation before it is too late.
14. Our survival as a people compels us to assert our right to maximum independence within Canada. We must develop our own economy and must acquire political independence for the Dene nation within the Canadian constitution. We must be able to govern our own lands and resources.

15. Thus our land claim must include not only the surface of the land, but the animals, the fish, the birds, the rivers and streams and the minerals underneath. And, most important of all, we must have our own system of government by which we can control and develop our land for our benefit.
16. Our aboriginal rights are meaningless if they do not mean the exclusive right to hunt, fish and trap. And that right, in turn, will have little meaning in the long-run unless Indian people are allowed to stop the damage to their land that results from present unplanned developments.
17. Where developments, as in mining, have already taken place, or for future development which we would be prepared to tolerate, we are entitled, as owners of the land, to receive royalties. These royalties could be paid out of the profits of the companies and need be no burden on the Canadian people. We would, in turn, use these royalties to fund community economic development that will last after the companies have exhausted the non-renewable resources.
18. We must develop plans to start our own economy as the community level. The present colonial pattern of development attempts to integrate us into a wage economy, as employees of companies over which we have no control. We want to strengthen our traditional land-based economy and at the same time create viable enterprises in the communities under the collective control of Indian people. That way our young people will have the chance to remain in the community rather than always having to move away, and even risk losing their identity, to find employment.
19. We must become involved in the education of our children in communities where Dene are in the majority. Local schools must be controlled by our people. In cases like Yellowknife, or hostels, where we are not the majority, we must have involvement -- or start our own schools.

20. Where outside governments have a continuing role after a land settlement, there must be a clear recognition of our rights as a distinct people, particularly at the local level. For example, native communities must have very clear powers with respect to control of alcohol.
21. In the communities, power should lie with the band council and, in the future, with the Dene Council.
22. Territorial Council must operate in such a way as not to infringe native rights. The same must be true if the day should come when a white majority in the North successfully demands provincial status.
23. Without in anyway abrogating our rights as the original inhabitants of the land, we recognize that non-native residents of the North who choose to make the North their home and respect our rights are themselves entitled to greater rights, in territorial and local elections, than are those who are merely transients.
24. Our own native organizations must themselves evolve so as to be able in due course to assume these new functions. In their operations and structures, they must become examples of our ideals.
25. To achieve all of this will not be easy. There is much work ahead of us, internally and externally. It will take effort from all the communities. A united effort is required on all issues involving the step-by-step achievement of our long term goals of maximum independence for the Dene Nation. Unless we are united among ourselves, we have little hope of winning a struggle so difficult as the one we are now engaged in.
26. We must unite our people at all levels -- between communities, between families, between Treaty, non-status and Metis, between young and old, between the traditionalists and the non-traditionalists, between regions, between tribes, between men and women. We must be prepared to identify and deal with enemies within as

27. We must have strong leadership supported by the communities. It is the duty of leadership to lead the way for development of the people and to support directions. But the leadership must always listen to the people and be prepared to build on creative energy of the people. It must always be accountable to the people through open and honest dialogue.
28. Although a united front is expected and required from all the communities on issues that have been sanctioned at general assemblies and have survived deliberation at the community level, this does not at all mean that people must remain quiet about those things that are remiss. Quite the contrary. Community people must make it their responsibility to confront our leadership either at the local level or at its highest level in those cases where justice has not prevailed. The more people demonstrate their true feelings and desires to the leadership, the greater the ability of the leadership to avoid errors and to implement what is in priority with local needs and desires.
29. With strong leadership, we must have clear ideals and goals for our people. The people's true needs and desires must be reflected in the goals and action. Communities must be thoroughly involved at every level of this total development. At no time should any goal or action be beyond thorough examination and not fit the ideals of the nation. Goals and ideals should be revised by the people as situations change requiring new directions.
30. Externally, we must again become a people making our own history. We must become actors, not just be acted upon by companies and government. The highway, proposed pipeline and dams, indeed, even the layout of our communities -- all are other people's plans to which we have been allowed at best only to react. We must become actors, planners, in control of development within our communities and our land. We must develop our own plans for development that will benefit our communities and all our people.
31. To be able to make our own history is to be able to mould our

own future, to build the new Indian society of the North that preserves the best of our part and our traditions while enabling us to grow and develop as a whole people. We want to build a society in which there is equality of all Dene people, and a society free of exploitative relationships between people. We are not opposed to change, but it must be on our terms under our control. To assert that right is to assume a great task, one at which we cannot afford to fail.

32. We know that there are powerful forces arranged against us. That is why we have not hesitated to appeal to others to support us in our just struggle. We ask that there be no major developments, like a pipeline, before a land settlement acceptable to us. We ask that we be allowed, in negotiating, with the government toward a land settlement, to put forward our demands as they stand. We ask that our rights as a people for self-determination within Canada be respected.

33. The great majority of people in Canada, are like ourselves in being relatively powerless in the face of big companies and by governments. In the face of our assertion of our rights, the choice that others must make is between ourselves, on the other hand, and the outside developers that are increasingly accountable to no-one, on the other hand. By joining us in our struggle people can begin as well to liberate themselves.

34. We the Dene, must all work together to a successful land claims settlement. This will be a big achievement in itself. It then becomes the means to achieve our real needs. Those needs are a land base and the political controls to determine what happens on our land. Above all, independence within Canada.

EXAMPLES OF
SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS

DECLARATION ON DEVELOPMENT

1. What other people may call development is not necessarily development for Indian people. Only Dene people can say what development means for the Dene nation. For example, many people say that the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline is "development", but this is not true for the Dene people. The pipeline may not only damage our land, but it might destroy our way of life as a nation. True development can only strengthen our nation and our way of life.
2. The people of the African country Tanzania were, like the Dene people, also invaded by a white colonial government. Today they are independent and they say this about development:

"Any action which does not increase the people's say in determining their own affairs or running their own lives is not development and holds them down, even if the action brings them a little better health and a little more bread."

In other words, we cannot call development any activity which takes away control from our people. True development must give us more control and greater independence.
3. True development means growth in Indian communities...not only economic development but cultural, social, political and spiritual development...and the sum of these is greater than the parts.
4. True development means building on the past, by strengthening traditional pursuits, by drawing on the community's experience, and by building on traditional skills.
5. True development means that development is implemented in a way that fits the Indian way of doing things (which is not the same as the government's way or the companies' way).
6. True development means a process which unites and builds up the community's sense of self and the sense of self of all its members.
7. True development means development by the community rather than by outsiders. It means development by the community as a whole wherever possible, rather than by individuals within the community for their own benefit.

8. True development means not participating, even as workers, in activities you cannot control. If such developments go ahead anyway (such as large resource developments), Indian people, as owners of the resource should benefit from royalties, and the political rights of Indian people (which would be threatened by an influx of white workers) would be protected by entrenching them as part of the land settlement.
9. True development means learning by doing so that development becomes an on-going, self-reinforcing process.
10. True development means getting expertise when it is needed in the form of short-term technical assistance without giving up ownership (even of the joint venture variety).
11. True development means communities cooperating with each other, regionally, and in the Mackenzie District as a whole (unity means power).
12. True development means long-term planning and setting priorities (since it's impossible to do everything).
13. True development means keeping our egalitarian and sharing society.
14. True development means setting an example for Canada.

DECLARATION ON ROLE OF NATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

The following should be the most important goals of our organizations:

1. To re-establish control of our independent Dene confederacy.
2. To assert the common identity of our people - Dene concept.
3. To obtain for every Dene community an adequate economic base to preserve its independence.
4. To be a vehicle for providing the solid support of the Dene people to band councils, Metis locals, and other Dene groups in their efforts in social, cultural, educational, spiritual, and economic development. To speak as one voice for the Dene people on major political issues, and work with other native organizations.
5. To fight racism,
 - by helping to overcome the ignorance in white society with regard to Dene peoples
 - by working to overcome economic inequality
 - by overcoming cultural and political domination through strengthening Dene culture and independence.
6. To be an example of our ideals in operations and structure.
7. To create a continuing dialogue between leadership and the Dene people, so that all benefit and develop using each others understanding and experience.
8. To establish ties, to support, and cooperate with other movements and efforts which contribute to the goal of independence and freedom for all people.
9. To build a society in which there is equality of all Dene people, and a Society free of exploitative relationships between people.

We can best achieve these goals in the following ways:

1. By making a good land settlement our first priority.
2. By abolishing colonial controls. This means forcing the government to recognize the authority of our chosen political structures, whether the Band Council/Metis Local or Indian Brotherhood/Metis Association. It also means involving ourselves only in developments we can control. Finally, it means reducing our dependence on government funding, because this kind of funding gives the government too much control.
3. By political and cultural education. It is the duty of leaders and people to learn about our nation and about the nature of the rest of the world - e.g. the oil companies, Canadian Society, colonialism. We should not keep our ideas to ourselves but meet with each other to discuss and exchange our understandings. This kind of dialogue contributes to true development.
4. By building a communal economy where the benefits of development are shared by the whole community according to need and where no individual benefits at the expense of his community.
5. By cooperation and sharing between communities in economic development.
6. By improving communication amongst our people: between leaders and people, between communities, between individuals.
7. By keeping maximum control in the hands of each community while maintaining a strong united front to the outside world.
8. By reducing inequalities amongst our people, especially in our organizations. By creating democratic and egalitarian organizations of our own and rejecting the white way with a boss at the top with all the control and workers at the bottom with no control.
9. By eliminating discrimination because of age or sex. Young and old, man and woman must participate as equals in rebuilding our nation.

STATEMENT ON STRATEGY AND ORGANIZING

FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF OUR GOALS

1. Our goal is maximum independence and self-determination of the Dene Nation within the Country of Canada through a just and equitable land settlement.
2. The struggle for achieving our goals involves organizing and strategy on two fronts: The external front and the internal front.
3. Our struggle is like a war, but a peaceful one. On each front there is an enemy. On each front there are allies.
4. On the external front the enemy is those not a part of the Dene Nation who resist and deny the achievement of our goals such as the government and other people who do not want to see the recognition and self-determination of the Dene Nation.
5. On the internal front the biggest enemy is ourselves, our disunity and lack of organization.
6. There are also Dene who are the enemy. There are Dene who would betray and are betraying their brothers in the struggle for their goal. These are Dene who work for the enemy against their brothers. These are traitors to the cause of the Dene Nation. We must learn to identify such persons.

7. There are also Dene who hold back the cause by forgetting who the real enemy is. These are Dene who prefer to fight amongst themselves rather than against the real enemy.
8. There are Dene who have not yet learned who the real enemy is. It is the duty and responsibility of Dene who have learned to recognize the real enemy to educate their brothers.
9. The struggle involves then the simultaneous battle on two fronts, internally and externally. While we organize and plan to build a strong organization and unity of all our people we must also organize and plan to defeat the enemy without.
10. Organizing and planning on the internal front means building unity and strength. It means breaking down that which divides us and educating our people and organizing so as to defeat the enemy without.
11. In fighting the enemy without we must at all costs keep a united front whatever our differences. We must always keep our differences to ourselves and solve our differences amongst ourselves. We must never fight amongst ourselves before the enemy.
12. We must accept that there now are real differences amongst us and always will be differences. But if we remain committed to our goal our differences will not defeat us. If we constantly remember that defeating the enemy is more important than our differences, we can solve the problems created by our differences.

13. Our differences are real. The most serious differences are between the Treaties versus the Non-Treaty and Metis and between the yougn and the old.
14. As long as we remember that there are differences between Indian and Metis, but that it is more important to remain united against the enemy then to fight amongst ourselves, we will be in a position to solve our differences ourselves.
15. The old people are our strength and wisdom. They are our roots to our history, tradition and cultures.
16. The young people bring energy and knowledge of the enemy to the struggle. They are the link to the future.
17. But the experience of the young people is much different to that of the old people. Often the old people do not understand and respect the young people.
- Often the young people do not understand the old people. What we must always strive for is an understanding and respect of the young for the old and the old for the young.
- Without that understanding and respect, we will fail, for the past will become separated from the future.
18. In fighting the enemy on the external front we must always remember that the way of the European is different from that of the Dene.
19. We must always remember that the situation is constantly changing. Each one of us must bear the burden of keeping ourselves informed on each change so that we can easily adapt and change our strategies so as to defeat the enemy.