

TREATY DAY

I DO FEEL GREATLY HONOURED AT BEING INVITED TO SPEAK AT THIS TREATY DAY RECEPTION AND I AM MOST GRATEFUL TO YOU.

TREATY DAY RECOGNIZES AND DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE TREATIES SIGNED BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MI'KMAQ AND BRITAIN IN 1700'S AND MARKS "THE SPECIAL AND UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE MI'KMAQ AND HER MAJESTY".

TREATY DAY IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THIS YEAR, IN A CONSTITUTIONAL SENSE, IN LIGHT OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE MEECH LAKE ACCORD AND THE GROWING RECOGNITION THAT CANADIAN HISTORY IMPLIES FAR MORE THAN THE CONCEPT OF TWO FOUNDING EUROPEAN GROUPS OF PEOPLE. TREATY DAY ALSO COMES ON THE EVE OF MAJOR CELEBRATIONS TO RECOGNIZE THE "DISCOVERY" OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT BY COLUMBUS, AN EVENT THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE UNFORTUNATELY HAVING TO MARK BY ORGANIZING WHAT THEY TERM A "DECELEBRATION".

AND THIS YEAR, TREATY DAY COMES WHEN THE EVENTS AT OKA, QUEBEC WEIGH VERY HEAVILY, AS THEY SHOULD AND MUST, ON THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS. VIOLENT CONFRONTATION HAS RESULTED FROM A LONG HISTORY OF FRUSTRATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT OVER THE FAILURE OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS TO RECOGNIZE ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS. IN NOVA SCOTIA, MI'KMAQ LEADERS HAVE BEEN WARNING FOR SOME TIME THAT A SIMILARLY MILITANT RESPONSE MIGHT OCCUR IN THIS PROVINCE IF STEPS ARE NOT TAKEN TO DEAL WITH LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES, AND PARTICULARLY WITH THE RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TREATY RIGHTS.

IT IS A SOURCE OF SOME ENCOURAGEMENT, THEREFORE, THAT IN RECENT DAYS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT HAS RECOGNIZED THE EXISTING ABORIGINAL RIGHT OF THE MI'KMAQ TO HARVEST WILDLIFE FOR FOOD AND FUR, SUBJECT ONLY TO THE NEEDS OF CONSERVATION AND SAFETY (SEE NEWSPAPER CLIPPING ATTACHED). THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER OCCASIONS, TOO, WHEN PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAVE SAT DOWN AND WORKED OUT, IN A COOPERATIVE MANNER, AN AGREEMENT TO RESOLVE AN ISSUE IN DISPUTE. THE GRADUAL TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY TO AN ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATION FOR FAMILY AND CHILD WELFARE RESPONSIBILITIES IS A CASE IN POINT.

BUT THESE ARE RELATIVELY RARE OCCASIONS. THERE ARE STILL MANY OUTSTANDING ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE RESOLVED - IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE AREA OF TAXATION, AND IN JUSTICE, TO NAME JUST A FEW. AS WITH THE MEETINGS BETWEEN THE MI'KMAQ NATION AND THE BRITISH SEVERAL CENTURIES AGO, IT IS NECESSARY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CONTEMPORARY MEETINGS, SUCH AS TREATY DAY, TO RENEW THE FRIENDSHIP AND TO RESOLVE TO UNDERTAKE CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIONS TO DEAL WITH ISSUES THAT WOULD OTHERWISE PRESENT THE THREAT OF CONFLICT AND CONTINUING INJUSTICE.

GOVERNMENTS ARE NOT ALONE IN HAVING A RESPONSIBILITY TO CHANGE ESTABLISHED PRACTICES; ALL MAJOR INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THE UNIVERSITY, HAVE SIMILAR OBLIGATIONS. SPEAKING AS A UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, I RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS NOT EASY TO HAVE THE RACIAL, CULTURAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY OF OUR SOCIETY REFLECTED IN THE STUDENT BODY, THE CURRICULUM, THE FACULTY AND THE SUPPORT SERVICES OF THIS INSTITUTION. I AM PLEASED THAT WE ARE MAKING SOME PROGRESS IN BREAKING BARRIERS TO ACCESS - BY INITIATIVES SUCH AS THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAM, GRADUATING FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS IN FIELDS SUCH AS SOCIAL WORK, COMMUNITY HEALTH, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND HOPEFULLY SOON IN LAW AND THE MEDICINE. I RECOGNIZE THE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE MADE TO THE UNIVERSITY, FOR EXAMPLE BY OUR RECENT HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT, DR. VIOLA ROBINSON. I ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING CLOSELY WITH DR. MARIE BATTISTE, WHO JUST LAST WEEK ATTENDED HER FIRST MEETING AS A MEMBER OF DALHOUSIE'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS.

BUT THE UNIVERSITY, TOO, HAS MUCH YET TO DO - IN REVIEWING THE CURRICULUM, FOR EXAMPLE, IN APPOINTING FACULTY MEMBERS WHO COME FROM FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES, AND IN WORKING WITH OTHER UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER LEVELS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, TO ENSURE THAT THE NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS FULLY QUALIFIED FOR, AND SUCCESSFUL IN, POST SECONDARY STUDIES INCREASES.

WE CANNOT EXPECT OUR GRADUATES, MANY OF WHOM BECOME LEADERS IN THE REGION AND FARTHER AFIELD, TO PROVIDE RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP INTO THE NEXT CENTURY IF THEIR UNDERGRADUATE, GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION DOES NOT ADEQUATELY INCORPORATE THE RICHNESS AND DIVERSITY OF CANADA'S RACIAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE. THAT IS OUR CHALLENGE.