National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part 1: Truth-Gathering Sessions

Maison de la famille

Maliotenam/Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, Quebec

PUBLIC

November 30, 2017

Public Volume 148

Véronique André

Heard by Sheila Mazhari
II

NOTE

The use of brackets [ ] in this transcription indicates that the certified transcription was modified to complete certain passages deemed inaudible or indiscernible by the original transcriber. The text was completed by listening to the original recording of the session. The modifications were made by Claudine Pelletier Paquin, research assistant for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Corrections were made by Ms. Pelletier Paquin on October 1, 2018, in Wendake, Quebec.
III

Table of Contents

Public Volume 148

November 30, 2017

Witness: Véronique André

Testimony of Véronique André ...................... 1
Legal dicta-typist’s certificate ..................... 37

Heard by: Sheila Mazhari

List of exhibits: none
November 30, 2017, Maliotenam, Quebec

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: OK. Hello, my name is Sheila Mazhari. I’m with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It’s November 30, 2017. We are in Maliotenam, Quebec. I’m speaking to Véronique from Maliotenam and the other person with us is...


MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: And Véronique, your testimony will be audio and video recorded. Do you consent to this?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Yes. Entirely. [I agree].

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Yes, OK. When you’re ready, you can introduce yourselves.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: My name is Véronique André. They use the name André on my cards [speaking Innu] from the federal government. I’m André to the federal government. And I’m Wala (phon.) to the federal government. The provincial government calls me André. So I have two names. My husband’s name, which is Wala, and... I fought for it, I fought for them to write my name André. I never won. Because they say, “You’re on...” in 1985, I think. I got married before 1985. That’s why my name is Wala. So I
don’t know. Sometimes I sign André, sometimes I [sign]
Wala. It’s confusing. Anyways, I tell myself it’s not my
real name. It wasn’t my name. They’re the names that the
missionaries gave us. So when we were in residential
schools... I was in residential school for 11 years. ’53 to
’65, I think. Anyway, I was there, a little girl. How the
[residential school] worked is that when we arrived they
gave everyone the same haircut. The bangs to here, and
here. It was very badly done; it was just meant to
humiliate us. Also, when we arrived at the residential
school, we all had to dress the same. We all followed the
same rules: prayer in the morning, morning prayer, prayer
before... There were never-ending prayers. Before eating,
after eating. Before class, and after. I don’t know how
many times–we got together a dozen times to pray. So we
learned the stories of the saints that are supposed to be
in heaven. I told myself, “I don’t want to go to heaven.”
After leaving, I told myself, “I don’t want to go to
heaven. I don’t know those people and I don’t want to know
anything about them.” I was always a very rebellious
person. I was rebellious, so... They didn’t... I wasn’t
molested because I could defend myself. And my father was
Chief. And when my father was Chief, he’s the one who
called his initiative, with the government. He’s the one
who built the [residential school]. So I, even then... He
came to see us often, to see how things were going...
That’s probably why I didn’t get sexually abused by the
nuns and priests. Um, I was saying... They were afraid of
my father because he was very authoritative. So I felt
protected, just by his name. He never protected me. Just
his name, because he was very authoritative. So I spent 11
years there. Eleven years of following rules: get up,
pray... Always the same routine. When they started talking
about residential schools, I thought, “I don’t remember any
of it. I know I went there, then it’s a blank. I don’t
remember.” I spoke to a psychologist about it, and he said,
“You don’t remember anything? You don’t remember anything
because it was like being brainwashed: you wear this, you
walk like this, you eat like that.” So that’s how it was.
And with... What brings me here is... We were separated
from our siblings when we got there. We were born on my
father’s ancestral land, close to the River Georges. It’s
very, very far from here. That’s where we were born. There
were 13 of us: nine girls and four boys. Thirteen of us,
born in the bush, with midwives. One of my sisters was born
in Tahamajesheratik (phon.). [Goose Bay.] The other was
born in the tundra. There are no trees at all there. So we
were on the edge of the tundra. As far as the Innu could
go, that was us. That’s where my siblings were born. So
part of my family didn’t go to residential school. They
were raised in the bush and continued to spend time in the
bush. They have been able to live without alcohol. There’s
my brother, and [Sister 1] [Sister 2] and [Sister 3]. And
there’s one of my sisters who was at residential school,
but she still drank. That’s [Sister 4]. The others, no, we
all drank after we left there. It’s the first thing when
you leave that place... Because our parents, you know...
When we came back from holidays, we went home for two
months. Not two months—a month and a half with our parents.
In 26 years, for 11 years you see your parents two, one-
and-a-half months, that’s... You’ve spent less than two
years with them. And we couldn’t even talk to them back
then, because the rule was: “Don’t speak when an elder is
present.” (Indiscernible), that’s what they wanted to say:
“You’re not allowed to speak to us when an elder is
present.” And there was always an elder present. So we were
never able to communicate with our parents when we were
young. We had to go back. One time, my father showed up at
the residential school and his face was (Indigenous words).
He convinced my mother his name was Hugo. My mother was
probably pregnant and he came to get the woman who was
supposed to help with the delivery. She arrived at the
residential school, my father arrived at the school and he
called all his children. He forgot me. He forgot to call
me. And then, I don’t know, he brought them home. The
children laughed at me. And I pretended that it didn’t matter. “I’ll be leaving on Sunday anyways.” Because at the residential school, you couldn’t show that you were afraid. You couldn’t show any weakness or you’d be done for. So I said, “It doesn’t matter. I’ll go Sunday instead.” And that’s what I did on Sunday... I went to my sister’s who had a big house. The midwife was there. They gave us dried meat to eat (indiscernible) (Innu word). With bone marrow from caribou legs. I was happy, because that was a treat for us. And my father wasn’t there when I got there. Then he showed up... He said, “Who’s this one who’s eating with such great appetite?” My sister, [Sœur 5], told him it was his daughter. His daughter Véronique. He said, “Oh, I forgot about you.” Then he tried to hug me and I pushed him away. That’s when the conflict with my father began. I told myself that when I was older, it’s only good for... He just uses my mother to make babies then runs away. As an adult, I always had conflicts with him. (Sobs). Every time I went... Every time I’d go see them, even then, after... When I was married. I’d go see them. There was always something negative. They don’t tell me anything. All her life, my mother never said a wrong word to me. So one time, when we were (indiscernible), living in a... They moved us often because the company was coming. We lived in tents, cabins. They moved us to (indiscernible). That’s where we
lived. There were cabins, hovels, what you’d call a slum really. There was no hot water, no toilets. We had to get water from a [lake] that wasn’t [polluted]. So it was a lot of work. One day, we were... We were about to have lunch. We were about to have lunch and I served myself, and my sister pushed me, and when (indiscernible) I got angry, and I threw the plate in her face and said, “Here, you can eat.” And my father got upset. He was ready to whip me with his belt (Indigenous word). “Don’t touch me,” I said, “I forbid you to touch me and you will not touch me.” I stood up to him. That was very insulting to him, because we weren’t allowed to say anything about our [parents]. He said, “My brothers, my parents died of starvation in the bush. They died of starvation in the bush. And you do this to your sister, the food.” I said, “It’s not my fault your parents died in the bush.” (Laughs). I was really hard on him because of what he did to me. We were always at odds with each other. I didn’t consider him as... I didn’t know, to begin with, I spent 11 years in the [residential school]. I didn’t get to know him like we know our fathers now, I think. (Indiscernible) [We] didn’t get to experience that. They were like strangers. So it was the same with my sisters. We got separated, but... Based on the age, when we got to the residential school there was a basket and a place for the big kids, and a place where our little
sisters were kept, away from the medium group, which I was
a part of. And the boys, the big ones, we were separated
from them. So today, I can’t say that I’m close to my
sisters because there was no bond... There’s no emotional
bond.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: You didn’t really
grow up with them.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: I didn’t grow up with
them, I barely know them. I got to know them after, when I
got married. But that core that you’re supposed to have as
a family, the bond, that was taken away at the residential
school. And that’s always been something we’ve missed. I
see my sisters, we say hello, and... That’s [it]. You
know... Whereas you see others all together, and...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: Your emotional
bond?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: My emotional bond was
broken. You could say there’s no connection. With my
brother, I had a brother who was a year older than me. With
him, I had more of a... Because he was close, because he
was close. That’s what happened. I’m close to my sister
[Sister 6], we’re so close that we experience the same
things. We were both raised the same way in residential
school. And... When she experiences something difficult, I
know that it’s going to happen to me two or three days
later. That happens a lot. Things with her children or other things. It’s rare that happy things happen, to say, “It happened to her, so it will happen to me.” No, never. Happy events, you could say. That’s the impact of residential school... It has made us behave like robots. My children often say, they’ll tell me something or see the hard things I’m going through and say: “You never cry.” [They’re upset with me] because I never cry. But at residential school, it was a defence mechanism. Everywhere, because I knew that it would make the nun very happy if I cried. If the children beat me, they would be really happy... So that’s why I learned not to cry when I was very young.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: To defend yourself?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: To defend myself. I could defend myself, but not cry. It was my defence mechanism, like I didn’t care. It was... When I think about that time, I tell myself that it wasn’t the bad clothes, the bad haircuts, the teasing, the bad food, but the relationships that were lost, with...

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: The family?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: With the family. Because we were “raised in the bush,” it wasn’t that. Everyone took care of each other. (Sobs) Because I’m... huh?
MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Uprooted.—(Speaking Innu).

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: (Agrees) They gave me back, when I went to high school... After 11 years, I said, “I’m not going back to residential school.” I was old enough, I said, “I’m not going back to residential school.” My father was very authoritative and he said, “[You’re] going back.” I said that I wasn’t going back. So he took me and said, “Come, we’re going to get the guy. The [Father].” The [Father] was the priest who was very strict. [Then] the Father, he... [Tried] to convince me to... I said “no,” that he didn’t scare me anymore than my father did. I said, “No, I’m not going back. I’m staying here. That’s enough.” So I didn’t go back, I stayed in town, in [Schefferville]... I was in [grade 9] and my education would continue there. After that, when I stayed home, my father would say, “You’re not even speaking your language.” He used to say that to us. We didn’t even speak Innu. “We can’t understand you when you talk to us.” How could he expect to understand us? There was no one there to teach us our language. That’s how people our age talked to each other, so there was no one to teach us how to speak Innu. But we understood each other, I understood (indiscernible), but their language, which was richer, we didn’t have that. We didn’t live in the bush, because it was the language of
So it was like a rejection. I took it as a rejection. “You don’t even talk…” [It was] an insult, too… And in town, you’re not accepted either. The two cultures, we weren’t accepted either, because they called us savages and… We found a way to feel better, and that was drugs and alcohol. Use of [type of… Everyone accepted]. I had to go to the hotel or things like that.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: Indigenous words.

MS VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: [“Come on already!” ] We got together as a group and had fun. That’s how I found some peace. Peace because they accepted me and I had fun. I sang and… Things were forgotten, the need to be loved by my family, by Whites… I didn’t [care]. So that’s it. I drank for 20 years. In the meantime, I got married. My husband went to residential school too. There was violence because he was abused at school when he was young and he had a lot of anger. I got hit a lot. He hit me when we fought, and the kids saw it. What made me, when I had my first child, I didn’t have… I had never seen a child, how to raise it, dress it, how to… I had been in residential school. There were no kids there, no babies, you know. There you are with a baby, you don’t know what to do, you don’t know what to do. And, anyways, I did my best. Since I was given away. Going to residential school is like being abandoned. I wasn’t loved. That’s why my child didn’t mean
anything to me. I loved him very much at first, but after... My mother and father kept him. I was free then, and I told myself, “I’ll never have another child.” I didn’t have kids for five years. I said to myself, “Never again.” They kept him. Because parents what they did, back then, what they did: they took their child–even though I wasn’t giving him up–they took him and raised him.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: The grandchildren?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: The grandchildren. So I did the same. I acted the same way that... They sent me to residential school, they gave me away, I gave my child away. I [had] a second one, my sister kept him–I didn’t give him away–my sister looked after him. At one point, my husband was angry and said, “I’m going to get him.” They didn’t want to give us our child back. So we tried taking him and it took... They called the police, and I went to jail because I wanted to see my child. I spend a night in jail because I wanted my child. That’s pretty bad. So I managed to get my child back anyway and to bring him back home to stay. After that I had a daughter, My Daughter, I told myself, because I often got beat up in those days. I told myself, “He’s not going to...” Because with the others, we often hid under the bed, the desks, in the closets. I told myself, “I’m not going to let that happen to my daughter.” [I brought her to my cousin’s, he] loves
her, and he says he loves his daughter. At one point, with
the comings and goings, they ended up keeping her and
[raising] her. So for the last one, my husband and I
started using less and we kept the last one. Residential
school had disastrous impacts on our family. Because my
children are upset at me for not keeping them, for not
being able to cry. I don’t cry in front of them, when
they... My children, I have four children. And three of my
children have tried to commit suicide. Suicide attempts.
The first one, the oldest, he drinks, that’s it. But the
other three have tried committing suicide. And each time,
I’m the one who had to rescue them. One time, I was out in
the bush, near here. I knew that one of my children had
been abused as a child. I could tell when he was doing OK
and when he was feeling down. And I saw them in front of
here, I saw him coming, and he looked despondent. So I
thought, “He’s going to make an attempt.” When he saw me,
he stood up tall, to pretend he was OK. So I went into the
bush with my husband. They came to get me to tell me that
he had shot himself near the heart, here. And it was my
youngest son who found him [outside]. And that’s... We went
back. And right away, he was [conscious.] He said, “It’s
not your fault, it’s not your fault...” So that we don’t...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: (Indiscernible) all
of a sudden?
MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: The other one wanted to hang himself. And I’m the one who went to see him in the cabin in the back. He was already up high. I couldn’t see anything, but I knew he was there because his shoes were at home. Then I yelled and started to cry, and I was yelling, “He killed himself, he killed himself.” (Indiscernible) my daughter also tried to commit suicide. Twice. I don’t know how many times the other one tried. One [day], I thought, “He’s going to do it.” You’re always expecting it, “When is it going to happen?” That’s... The evil. The evil we got from the residential schools and that we passed on to our children, that will be passed on to [my grandchildren]... When will it end? I don’t know when it will end. I did everything I could, I’m doing all sorts of things to be well. I’ve been a teacher for 44 years. I keep working because I can’t stop. When I try to stop, I feel like I’m going to go crazy.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:] It’s what keeps you going?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: It’s what keeps me alive, and every year, maybe it’s me who passed that despair to them, because I’ve felt that despair for a long time, too. I’ve never told my children that sometimes I’d like to be on the other side. I’ve never told them that, because it doesn’t stop, this despair, this life that the
residential schools have left us with. It robbed us of our identity, of our parents’ knowledge, of the love we had when we were young.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:] The love that you missed?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: For the love that we missed. I’m 71 years old now, almost 72. I look and often think, “What is it like on the reserve?” I often say to my grandchildren, “If you don’t keep studying, you’ll wander around, wander around the reserve your whole lives.” Doing nothing because you can’t handle feeling well. I know how much well-being they have. If they know something they have to pay for electricity, rent, food. There’s no future in that. And I wonder, why does that only happen to our people? How come I watch YouTube and see so many talented people playing guitar, and other musical instruments. Talented singers. How come none of our people are like that? How come there aren’t people who seem [to be] doing well? Why doesn’t that happen to us? We’re been destroyed. And in other communities, like the Blacks, sometimes I see on TV that there are people who want to help them, who love them, and they manage to do it, to go to school and leave the misery behind. But not here. A reserve isn’t a place for young people. If they want to survive, this isn’t the place. They have to live because there are too many
negatives: alcohol, drugs. Last week, my grandson was
admitted to the hospital. He had heart palpitations. At the
hospital, they asked him if he had taken drugs or smoked.
He said no. I said, “If you smoked, say it now, it’ll make
things better and it’ll go quicker.” He said that he had
never smoked. It was obvious that he wasn’t acting
normally. The analyses came back, and he had smoked pot and
hash, [according to the doctor]. After that, he had a lung
exam. They made us come back the next day to (speaking an
Indigenous language).

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:]
A scan?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: (speaking an Indigenous
language).

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:]
[X-Ray?] (Speaking an Indigenous language). Nuclear
medicine.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Nuclear medicine,
that’s where they brought him. His lung was destroyed. A
part of his lung was destroyed, all black, and it’s going
to stay like that. It won’t regenerate.
It’s going to stay like that. And he gets shots twice a
day, he has to get shots here twice a day, for six months.
And it’s the grandson I was looking after, because his
mother couldn’t look after him because of how she behaves.
How old is he?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Thirteen years old. So his mother left with him to try to convince him. I told her (indiscernible), I won’t take him. Because he’s like, “No, no, no, no. I won’t do that, no, no, no, no.” That’s it. And now the government is going to legalize it. [Our people] are going to be even more at risk of disappearing with all that. I don’t know what’s going on with that, but it could have killed him. We wouldn’t have brought him there, with his damaged lung. So I don’t think the government’s the one that’s going to provide solutions. All it has done is bring misery to our people for generations and generations. What good has it done for us? It created discord within us. I think... I’m... I’ll tell you. I think that the government, I suggest that the government take a look at education. Everywhere, how it educates, how we [get educated], in institutions, the people who can get their certificate or skills in their field. We should educate them in... I noticed people who had a lot of education, who had a lot of people for others. Those who have a lot of education, I’ve always noticed that they know how to live, I have to say. Because they took... They went to school for a long time. They’ll never show us something that will make us feel bad. Especially here, in Sept-Îles, there’s a lot
of racism. One time, I was at the hair salon. I go all the
time, I go to the hair salon all the time. I’ve always
gone. I’d been there before and they had always treated me
well, but there was a new girl. There was a new girl there.
There were a lot of Whites there and customers, it was
busy. She looked at me like I had lice. I said, “I don’t
have lice. I’ve never had lice.” She said, “Some people
have them.” And I said, “I don’t have them.” So I got up...
They were laughing. I got up and went to see the manager.
She said,
“Yes, some people come here and they have tons of lice. The
lice even move around.”
“If there’s lice moving around here,” I said, “maybe that’s
because you’re not cleaning properly.” I [said], “It’s a
shame, but I’m not coming back here. I’m going to tell
everyone I know to stop coming here. You don’t respect Innu
people.” I spread the word and never went back. I think
that [there are fewer] people because their customers
were... So we were the ones who (indiscernible). But there
are fewer customers now. It used to be full. I spread the
word, I talked about it, and now people don’t go anymore.
If they don’t respect us, we won’t go there. Like in [town]
the Innu weren’t getting any respect. Stores shut higher,
the stores shut, for shopping. We don’t shop where we
aren’t respected. We don’t go places where we feel the
racism. I had a business, I have a business. But I had it because of the ships that came here, the big cruise ships. I opened it because of that and they came to see me. I didn’t approach them; they came to see me. And they asked if I was willing to welcome tourists. So I thought that would be a good way to share our story with others. Quebecers are a lost cause, [I told myself]. Forget Quebecers, but with foreigners, it could help if they knew our story, how we experienced it, and not what’s written in textbooks. That’s what I told them when they came. I presented the whole program: how we used to live, up to today. A good program. There were legends, even traditional signs. There was métissage, spirituality... An explanation of how we used to live. I talked about the residential schools. One time, a tourist asked me if there was racism in Sept-Îles. I told him that there was a lot of racism. But the tour guides were from Sept-Îles. The next year, I was told I had to change my program. “You have to change your program, you have to do it this way.” I said, “No, this is my plot, no one can tell me what to do in my spâce. If you’re not happy with it, I’ll be fine without you. You can stay where you are. I won’t change my program,” I said, “the Innu aren’t monkeys. If you want me to bring a bunch of Innu, it’s not to create a zoo. It’s to share my culture.” The man who had written to me, the manager who
finds the cruise passengers (indiscernible) said, “If you
don’t change your program, if you just want the customers
to come and only look at pictures (indiscernible).” I said,
“No, that’s true.” That was why. When I accepted, it was to
share my culture. If that doesn’t happen, keep your ships,
I don’t want them. I’ll be just fine without your boats.
You don’t have to empty my... Keep your boats. That’s what
happened. They duped me. I had to start over. My husband
wrote, “When this person says no, stop trying. It doesn’t
work like that. It doesn’t work like that with her.” So I
lost my ships. So my company is more or less profitable
now, but it doesn’t matter. I get children, the communities
come. People from the community come to [the site] to
unwind.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: That’s what keeps you
going.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: That’s what keeps me
going. I can’t give up because I’m convinced that the
children need that. I’m convinced that I was raised in
that, that’s what saved me. I’m convinced that if they see
the good, they’ll go further. It’s to learn more. The
recommendation I would give to the government would be to
provide the funds to allow people to come here. Nowadays
youths and people our age are very interested in Indigenous
spirituality. Even doctors come from far away and we never
have enough money to bring them here. To bring them here often to take care of our injuries, illnesses, because they use medicinal plants a lot. I’ve never been to the hospital; I’ve always used plants. I don’t take any medication. I’m 71, my husband is 73, we don’t take any medication. We take care of ourselves with what we learned from our parents. He also says that we always go out into the bush. On the land, to continue on the path of our ancestors. We take the train and it takes 12 hours. Schefferville to the land, it takes 10 hours. We take snowmobiles. And my sons follow us. Two of them follow us wherever we go. They’re very, even [Son 1], he’s good at that, sharing the story of his people. To talk about the land. The other, [Son 2], he’s into songs, the drums and legends. Because [Son 2] isn’t very good with his hands. [Son 2] has a good memory. Whatever you tell him, his memory is phenomenal. So we had everything we needed for our workshops: I had my brothers, I had my brother. I had my sister, I had my cousin. It was a family thing, what had been passed down to us. We were channelling my parents. It worked for us, it worked well, and the young ones liked it a lot. Nowadays, the issue in our communities is the loss of our language. Young people tend to speak French a lot. They don’t have pride in their language. But there are many openings, positions that could be available to them if they
knew their language. They probably think it won’t be useful in finding a job. But I once supervised Cégep interns. And everyone who was there, most of them had a career in that field. They are directors, they’re doing very well...

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:] Good jobs.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Good jobs. They made it, with their language and their culture. I’d like to see that course offered in Cégeps again. And sometimes there are summer jobs. Summer jobs for students. These students should be paid to learn their language. Instead of picking up paper, mowing lawns... That’s what they should do. Because our identity is based on our language.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: With your plot (indiscernible)...

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: With my plot...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: They could learn a lot.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: (Agrees) Uh-huh.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: Uh-huh.

(Indiscernible).

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: They could learn a lot because no one knows how to weave the...

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: [MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE:] Snowshoes?
MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: There aren’t a lot of snowshoes. They’re disappearing. There aren’t many. It’s our only opportunity, now, to teach them. I approached someone once. A white person. But he was married to an Innu. The man had learned from his father-in-law. And his father-in-law taught at a school. The children didn’t care about any of it. They just ran around. He was there, listening to his father. That’s who he learned it from. It isn’t because the other didn’t want to teach it, it’s the children who didn’t want to learn. But I’m sure young adults would learn it. Young parents.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: The language is Innu?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Huh?

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: The Innu language, yes.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: The Innu language, snowshoes and... The Innu language.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: The Innu language, yes.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: That’s my recommendation to the Commission. They should think about it, because there has to be some (indiscernible).

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: We need to distribute the money wisely; we need a guideline. (Speaking Innu). In fact, (indiscernible) that money be well
distributed and that we invest in *inuindu* (*phon.*). She has a plot where all the students come to learn about it. That [injects] that.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Because they received a lot of grants. But it’s just that...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: They didn’t use it for.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: It isn’t long-term. It’s a day, like a picnic day. That’s not cost effective for the children. They like it, but they like being *(indiscernible)*, it isn’t...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: [Ms. André] would ask, it’s a job more than, living in a cottage with all the camp sites. And the place for that, and what’s special about the plot that’s there, at the Mauricie River, is that her parents were there. They went fishing for salmon there. They camped there. And what did you call it?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: *(Indiscernible)*. And there’s something, the Innu were there, but when I made the site, they made me pay. Like the energy there, the land and forests, they made me pay. I pay to use that site. I don’t pay anymore, but I’ll keep using it. It belonged to the Innu, [but] since I was going to make money, they made me pay.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: – *(Speaking Innu)*
MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Yes. They made me pay and... I get letters saying I haven’t paid for this year. I won’t pay. I won’t pay because I know that it belongs to them. It was just a requirement for me to get a grant from Indigenous Affairs. It’s crazy.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: And they would get together... On that plot.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: And it took time, and it was our family plot.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: They got together there, they had nice meals. One day, you should go, go see Véronique. Come back and we’ll show you in summer. It’s beautiful.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: And the impacts that I’ll call the invisible impacts of the residential schools. Sometimes it’s petty what they... For example, they’ll have more confidence in a white person doing the same job. Do they have a diploma? We’ll take the white person. Like in (?). When you’re having a hard time, going through things, you don’t feel like forcing yourself to speak French. It happens all the time...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: (Indiscernible).

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: It’s always French-speaking people who are in charge. And they haven’t experienced what we experienced. How can they help us? How
can they understand what we’re trying to say? They can’t.  
But they get paid for that. We also see a lot of nurses.  
Nurses. We have a lot of Innu nurses. But when you  
(indiscernible) a white nurse. It always takes a lot. Go to  
Sept-Îles and see where the Innu are working in Sept-Îles.  
You won’t find any. You won’t find any Innu working in  
Sept-Îles. They never get hired. There isn’t a single Innu  
working for the city. Or in the shops. It’s serious,  
serious racism. And I’m asking the government what is it  
doing about the racism? Against its, how do you say, its  
citizens. Is it in charge of them? Is it managing them?  
What is it doing about it? It needs to educate them.  
Educate young people. The ones who come are already a lost  
cause. They’ve already been here. Literally coming onto the  
reserve, trying to get people into the church.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: And are things better  
in Maliotenam?  

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: There are no Whites  
here.  

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: No, but...  

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: [In Maliotenam],  
we’re out of the way, like I said earlier. The people  
within the discriminations there. Because us in town  
(speaking an Indigenous language).  

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Because it’s like they
know who you can demean there. Who you can belittle. I don’t let them get away with it. If someone butts in front of me when I’m in line, I say, “No, I was there first.” If someone else tries, I say, “No, I was there first, you wait your turn.” We defend ourselves. We may end up in jail, but we defend ourselves now. And the young people are getting more aggressive. They don’t ignore anything.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: And have you known girls or women who have disappeared? Or were murdered?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: In Sept-Îles?

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: And have you known other girls or women who...

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: I didn’t know any women who have disappeared, but... My uncle disappeared in the bush. With his wife. They never found him. But they never really looked for him either. My uncle. With his wife. They found their child.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: What year was this?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Oh God, that must have been in the 1950s.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: (Speaking an Indigenous language).

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: And my father always thought it was weird, because they found the child in the tent. He was well positioned, but usually when you hunt
year-round, you have your pelt bag with you. They never
found the pelt bag and they never found their ropes.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: The couple?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Yes, they were a
couple.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: So there was never any
investigation or anything?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: No. That’s it. I don’t
know if the government will provide any solutions. I don’t
really trust it. I don’t trust it because all the
government does is pull out an envelope and say, “Here,
this is how much the Commission will cost. It costs this
much. The Inquiry Commission costs this much.” It’s going
to say [the amount]. But before that, it cut everything, it
cut the budget for health, education...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: And infrastructure,
housing...

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Yes.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: All the programs.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: They were cut. That’s
where it got the money to do this. They cut everything
else. Schefferville, I’m [in Schefferville] more [because I
work there]. It’s really unique place. Weirdly, it’s 350
miles from here, by train or plane. When there’s no, there
aren’t any specialists there. When they’re sick, they have
[to go] to Quebec City or Montreal. To go to Quebec City, they have to take a 12-hour train ride. By car it takes, what, eight hours? Eight hours. They have their appointments say one day, then they have to come back and do the same thing. It used to be covered, now it isn’t anymore.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: There were cuts in transportation.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Uh-huh, for transportation. When I work there, I get a treatment for my eye, and I’m not allowed to take the plane. I have to take the train, then the car, get my treatment, come back, I take the train to work, and that takes four days, but you don’t get many sick days. Imagine the others.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: Imagine those who don’t work.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: I witnessed some injustice. They don’t take care of drunk people. If you’re drunk, they won’t take care of you. Even if you have a son who’s sick, they know you’re sick. Not to go there, that’s not where you would go if you were drunk. You want to have fun and... Those guys. One time, I saw a crowd there. They were all looking at something. I asked a student what was going on. They were standing in a half circle. I asked her what was happening. She said, “They don’t want to take her
in. The woman on the ground, she needs a respirator.” They didn’t want to take her because she had drunk beer. At one point, one of the people who were there went over and brought the woman inside. But you could see the nurse yelling that he didn’t want her. But the other one got mad and told him [to take care of her]. My sister lost two of her children because they were alcoholics and they didn’t get taken care of. There’s my sister, [Sister 4]. She had already lost her husband. She had her two sons left. Both of them drank. One had diabetes and had high blood pressure. High blood pressure. High blood pressure. And he went to the doctor’s and asked if he could go to Sept-Îles so that they could stabilize...

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: His diabetes.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: His diabetes. [And his blood pressure]. She said, “You’ll go this summer, you’ll go this summer.” [That was six months away]. [Nephew 1] died. He died two months later. The same thing happened to the other son. It was his leg. Since he was drunk, he didn’t receive treatment and he died.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Because he couldn’t get to [the hospital], to the doctor’s...

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Because he was always drunk. It’s not because he didn’t have the means. [He could have found a way]. He was too drunk. We had to fight, my
sister and I, to get them to treat him. But it was too late and he died. That’s what happens in our communities. He isn’t the only one, she isn’t the only one. There are no elders left over there. It’s not normal. There’s [a lack of care] somewhere. Anyways.

MS. KATHLEEN MCKENZIE: It’s a shock.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: That’s what I had to say. The government has to find a way to fix what it did. It destroyed everything, absolutely everything. It has to give us means to rebuild. We do well when we spend time in the bush with our family. But we can’t stay there year-round, we go for three months. Two months. One week. We can afford to do so, but those who don’t work can’t afford to go out to the bush. It’s expensive. You need gas, you need... Lots of stuff. We can afford to do it because my husband works too. That’s it. Sometimes we wonder what’s going to happen to our children. We lived like that. Our children lived like that. When will it end? Why don’t we ever get some help? People who can give these children a chance to rise up, play hockey, or learn to sing or dance. When we were in residential school, it was music that saved us. It was music that saved us when we were young.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: What kind of music?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Laughs. You’re going to laugh: Elvis Presley. My husband knows all the albums
and all the singers from the 50s and 60s. Yes. It was always music. I spent the year, my holidays, dancing, dancing. I still dance when I’m alone. I still listen to a lot of music, because it keeps me going. And I think it’s so unfair that... Those people can’t be that talented. Everything seems so easy for them, but here: nothing. None of that.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: Would you like to share a message in Innu?

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: With all that the Inquiry Commission is doing, I still believe. I believe that the sun is rising for us. We have to keep believing. Our children will rise up. I’m certain of that. If we stop believing that, well... That’s what I had to say, thank you very much. I [can’t] take my glasses off because I had surgery. (Laughs) Sorry about wearing my sunglasses.

MS. SHEILA MAZHARI: I’m going to stop here.

MS. VÉRONIQUE ANDRÉ: Yes.

END OF RECORDING
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE*

I, Félix Larose-Chevalier, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcription of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Félix Larose-Chevalier
August 26, 2018

* This certificate refers to the original transcript in French.