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NEWS RELEASE

After James Bay: Aboriginal people only marginally better off

Impact of pioneering treaty on Northern Quebec Crees and Inuit mixed

Montreal – While there has been some improvement over the past 30 years, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) has not dramatically altered the living conditions of the Crees and Inuit, according to a new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

The study, "Aboriginal Quality of Life Under a Modern Treaty: Lessons from the Experience of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of Nunavik," found that infrastructure, health, education and income have improved since the 1970s. However, in other areas, such as housing, conditions for these Aboriginal people are considerably worse than they are for other Canadians.

From a government perspective, treaties are often seen largely as land transactions, but most Aboriginal people see them in broader terms. "Treaties must evolve and adapt to the changing realities on the ground," says author Martin Papillon. "They are more appropriately understood as living documents."

With the signing of the Paix des Braves in 2001, Quebec agreed to greater Cree participation in the economy of the region. According to Papillon, the agreement changes the philosophy of Cree-Quebec relations on issues related to the management of natural resources and regional economic development.

"It would be hard to imagine Quebec going forward with a major development project now without obtaining the consent of the Crees and the Inuit, and without negotiating some form of revenue sharing agreement," notes Papillon.

"Aboriginal Quality of Life Under a Modern Treaty: Lessons from the Experience of the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee and the Inuit of Nunavik," by Martin Papillon, can be downloaded free of charge from www.irpp.org.

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