



CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO
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Address by
Ms. Michèle S. Jean
President of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO

on the occasion of

the Manicouagan-Uapishka Biosphere Reserve Mobilization Forum

Jardin des glaciers
Baie-Comeau, June 17, 2009

Mr. di Piazza, Mayor and Warden of the Manicouagan RCM

Mr. Charrette,

Ms. Bouamrane, UNESCO representative, Paris

Distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today to open this forum on mobilization.

On behalf of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, I would like to thank the Manicouagan-Uapishka Biosphere Reserve (MUBR) team, Christian Bouchard and the entire board of directors, Jean-Philippe Messier and Marie-Pierre Clavette, for organizing this important event.

It is not, of course, an isolated initiative, but one that is part of the trend of leadership and dynamism demonstrated by the MUBR since it was designated by UNESCO in 2007.

By welcoming the numerous stakeholders from the region who are present here today, you are demonstrating your openness and willingness to share your approach and to ensure everyone's full participation. I am convinced that the presence of outside guests will be enriching and thought-provoking. On our end, we will certainly learn a great deal from your exchanges and actions.

The essential mandate of UNESCO and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is to provide a platform for cooperation in education, science, culture and communication. In fact, we can say that the Biosphere Reserves are “mini-UNESCOS” at the local level since they are places of scientific education, emergence and sharing. Furthermore, like you, these Biosphere Reserves are interested in the coming together and the vitality of all cultures in their regions.

In the image of UNESCO, which, in an increasingly complex global context, acts as a platform for consensus between 193 countries, the Biosphere Reserves are attempting, at a local and regional level, to bring partners together through a common vision for the future, despite pitfalls and difficulties. UNESCO is proud of this large network, which aims to provide a global example of sustainable development, and your forum will be an important contribution in this direction.

The challenges associated with sustainable development have unquestionably become a dominant theme of international cooperation in the 21st century. These challenges reflect our interdependence in a world that requires each of us to continually adapt to circumstances that are changing increasingly quickly. Serving as places of education on sustainable development, the Biosphere Reserves are at the heart of this dynamic. All eyes are on you while researchers, communities,

businesses and governments around the world try to find ways to reconcile quality of life, a healthy environment and a vibrant economy.

Having participated in discussions on these issues in several countries, it seems to me that education and collaboration are two essential keys to an enhanced future. These keys, which are at the centre of your actions, can enable the acceptance and appropriation of new ways of thinking and acting in order to constantly renew our knowledge and update skills—in short, to reinvent ourselves together, to push our limits and to recognize that diversity is a strength, not a weakness.

It is with this in mind that, on behalf of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, I congratulate you on the efforts that you have made to bring together regional strengths.

Of course, a Biosphere Reserve cannot be content with merely being reactive; it must be proactive, and thus is based on a vision of the future that builds on the efforts of all stakeholders and the development of local knowledge. This approach is at the core of the reputation of your Biosphere Reserve, which is increasingly becoming known not only in Canada, but at UNESCO and in the global network of Biosphere Reserves.

Since its designation, the MUBR has made a name for itself through its dynamism and innovation, providing new hope. Until now, few organizations tied to UNESCO had tried to extend the process of collaboration of a Biosphere Reserve to include such a range of partners, particularly heavy industries. Despite its relatively recent UNESCO designation, Manicouagan-Uapishka has demonstrated its foresight in facing the future because industries and the private sector are increasingly recognizing that the future of the economy must be supported by a high-quality social and natural environment.

In a context of globalization, we must revise our understanding of individual as well as corporate citizenship. In fact, citizenship today can no longer be limited to only a political or national scope. It must also include an expanded concept of our rights, freedoms and responsibilities.

This means that, on a daily basis, our consumption choices, our methods of transportation and communication, and our interactions with our fellow citizens must take into account the impact that they have on other regions of the globe and future generations. This demonstrates the relevance of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Moreover, your choice to make the forum an eco-responsible event clearly demonstrates that your values translate into concrete actions.

It seems to me that the mobilization forum highlights the importance that you place on the participation of all stakeholders from different sectors, whether they be social or economic, in view of ensuring a viable future for all.

In conclusion, taking into account the originality of your vision and your continued efforts to implement it, I would like to highlight the importance of your contribution on a national and international level, a contribution that allows your region to shine and inspire action in other regions around the world. We hope that this momentum will continue in coming years!

Thank you again for this invitation and enjoy the forum.