



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Speaking Notes on Youth Crime Grand Chief Ron Evans AMC Press Conference Friday, October 19, 2007, 10 a.m.

- Today, I want to talk about solutions. It's time to stop pointing fingers. Manitoba has the highest rate of children who commit murder in Canada. Gang violence is plaguing our youth and this violence is touching the lives of all Manitobans. It's time for us to come together to find solutions.
- An article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* yesterday says that "experts say what drives the higher numbers in Manitoba are poverty in isolated First Nation communities, drug and alcohol use, and participation by youths in gangs."
- Today's *Winnipeg Free Press* points out that "among First Nations youth, aged 15 to 29, only 33.7 per cent had completed high school, compared to 62.7 per cent in the general population..."
- It all begins with poverty. The problems that we are seeing now all start with poverty.
- I am here today, not to blame, but to help Manitobans understand what is happening to our children so that we can create a safer Manitoba for all, including First Nations communities.
- I will be meeting with the Mayor later today to discuss a plan for stemming the tide of youth violence in Winnipeg. I have sat down with the grandmothers, I've met with the youth, I've spoken to the Elders, and I would like to extend an invitation to any elected official who is concerned about this growing situation to sit down with me. Let's do something about this situation. Let's do it together. And let's do it now.
- I want to explain to all Manitobans why this situation has worsened and what we are planning to do about it.
- We have identified four main areas stemming from poverty and they are:
 - cultural disconnection
 - lack of access to services
 - the temptation and need to join gangs, and
 - policing and security challenges.

1. Cultural disconnection

- What is cultural disconnection? What does that really mean?



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- Mark Totten is the director of research at the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa. He was quoted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in an article entitled “Kids Who Kill” that ran last Sunday, October 14. He talked about residential schools, whose purpose was to separate children from their families and according to the Royal Commission to “kill the Indian in the child.” Totten also refers to the 60s scoop and decades of foster homes. Together, these systems have stripped our young people of their identity. What does this mean?
- How do parents learn to look after children? Oftentimes, people find themselves doing what their own parents did or NOT doing what their parents did. Either way, they learn parenting from living with their parents and grandparents.
- Until 1980, the majority of First Nations people in Canada did not grow up with their parents. They were “legally” under Canadian law removed from their homes, some as young as age of 4 and raised by teachers and supervisors in residential schools, where sexual, emotional and physical abuse was rampant.
- We have all heard about the horrors of this experience. Children were taught abuse and violence. They did not learn to be part of a family, in turn to become loving, caring, supportive, nurturing parents. Their only examples were abuse and violence. Therefore today, many parents cannot nurture and support their own children. They don’t know how.
- We are now witnessing the devastating effects of this botched assimilation attempt.
- So what is the solution? We are taking steps with our Child and Family Services system to work with families to create the kind of supports they need to raise their children. We MUST give this system a chance. Case transfers under devolution have been in place only since 2003. Children were dying in Foster Care before this. In 2001, 21 children throughout Manitoba died of unnatural causes while in care. In 2002, the figure went up to 28. Not all of these children were First Nations. Case transfers under devolution did not take place until 2003. I repeat, we must give this system a chance to work, and we must give it the necessary resources.

2. Lack of access to services

- The next issue I want to talk about is lack of access to services.
- Kids growing up in isolated communities have almost no access to sports, music or any of the extracurricular activities that children in urban areas



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might have. They often don't even have an adequate school to attend. There are no home ec classes, there are no shops, there are no science labs, there are no gymnasiums. Often, schools consist of several grade levels operating out of one bare bones classroom.

- Parents try to do their best for the children.
- Some may try to entrust their children to the care of a grandparent or other family member who their child can live with and attend school in the city. However, in order to become a guardian, a grandparent, would have to file a notice of application with the Court of Queen's Bench. Then there is a hearing. If no one contests the guardianship, Child and Family Services must do an assessment of the home to determine its adequacy.
- Can you imagine going through all of that so that your child could live with their grandparents or other family members?
- It is important that Manitoba's government honour and respect First Nation traditions and the role of grandparents and extended family in raising a child. First Nations believe that it takes a community to raise a child.
- Other parents must give up their children into CFS care in order to get them to school in the city. Can you imagine giving up your parental rights so your child could go to a better school?
- What is the solution? One solution is to make a change to the Public Schools Act to make it easier for all Manitobans to assign a guardian for their children. I would be ready and willing to discuss this with the province to see how this could be done.

3. Temptation and need to join gangs

- Thirdly, there is the temptation and need to join gangs.
- You grow up in poverty. Your school is inadequate and probably doesn't give you an education that will actually lead you anywhere. You don't have enough food to eat or decent clothes to wear. You don't believe you'll ever attain anything in your life. And No one else does either.
- Or you are bullied by others in your school.
- Or you are simply a young person who is looking for other young people to interact with.
- So whether you are inner-city poor, or from an isolated community, whether you are bullied or just a kid looking for a friend, suddenly you get



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the chance to be a part of what seems to be a larger family, a gang. These people pretend to believe in you. They'll stand up for you and give you a sense of belonging and security. You'll find yourself earning money, getting respect and having a support network—what many people call a family. Now why wouldn't a kid want all of that?

- Gangs are open and recruiting 24-7. Where are the services to counteract this?
- What about the kids who do get involved and then want to get out? First, will the gang let you go? If you've already been involved with the law, what are the chances you will get a job? What are the chances that anyone will sponsor your education? You're stuck.
- So what's the answer? I want to remind everyone that in the 1990s, the problem of gang violence became so rampant that in 1997 the federal government provided funding to hire Canada's first full-time gang prevention co-ordinator.
- This three-year plan was implemented but fell by the wayside when the problem of gangs ceased to be big news. Lack of political will, lack of media attention, just simply lack of interest meant this plan was not followed through.
- So now the gang situation is back in the news. And not only is it back, it's worse. Crime rates are the highest ever.
- Increasing penalties is not the sole answer. What we need to do is come up with a plan and stick to it. That means all of us leaders—First Nations, federal, provincial, municipal. At every level, we must ignore jurisdictional battles and the "hot topic" of the day, and we must implement a concrete, long-term strategy.
- We have a blueprint. We have the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. My staff have copies available of the section on youth justice. It contains 16 specific recommendations. Now we just need the political and public will to implement these recommendations.

4. Policing and security challenges

- Now I want to move on to policing and security challenges.
- I agree with Acting Chief Zacharias who said in yesterday's *Winnipeg Free Press* that "while police deal with the aftermath of youth violence,



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addressing its root cause is a societal issue. This is not an issue you can arrest your way out of, he said.”

- Mayor Sam Katz has called the Winnipeg Police Service a “broken” police department.
- Let’s work together to come up with solutions. Let’s stop pretending that there are no problems. There are individual police officers who abuse First Nations people. They are out there. This does not mean all police officers, many of whom are dedicated public servants determined to make the world a better place. But for those who DO abuse First Nation people, there needs to be consequences. There can be no consequences without leadership.
- This is one of the things that I will be speaking with Mayor Katz about today. I invite Acting Chiefs Zacharias and Webster to meet with me as well. I also want to point out that the AMC has created the E.A.G.L.E. Urban Transition Centre. An RCMP liaison officer is on duty who is ready and willing to work with the Winnipeg police. We want all Manitobans to be aware that EAGLE is there to help assist First Nations moving to the city. But we also want Manitobans to know that this service is available to the police. We encourage any and all police officers to contact EAGLE with any questions or concerns you have when dealing with First Nations in the justice system.
- Let’s stop playing the blame game. As Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, I want to say “Enough is Enough.”
- I propose that we create a roundtable on youth crime. I call upon all levels of government to join me in this AMC-led roundtable. I use the media to do this because this situation must be dealt with now.
- We need to ensure safety for all Manitobans and a future for our youth.
- In closing, I want to quote a great leader, Chief Sitting Bull, “Let’s put our heads together and see what kind of world we can create for our children.”