



ICA INDIGENOUS MATTERS SUMMIT

SEE US | HEAR US | WALK WITH US

CHALLENGING AND
DECOLONISING
THE ARCHIVE

EGIM  **ICA**

Expert Group on Indigenous Matters

Groupe d'Experts sur les Affaires Autochtones

Closing remarks

Normand Charbonneau, Deputy Librarian and Archivist of Canada and ICA Vice-President Programme

After such a great day of discussions, I feel the need to address a few words to my fellow non-indigenous colleagues in the room today.

The colonial systems implemented in our countries and their various consequences : school systems built to take the indigenous culture, mind and soul out of the indigenous body, forced adoption, re-location of indigenous communities, to name but a few, were sometimes developed with the indigenous good in mind because the colonialists believed they knew better, but it is clear most of these actions had racist or even genocidal motivations.

What often remains are deconstructed societies, which today and for a long time to come will continue to suffer from the consequences of the colonial system.

Our archival institutions were founded on colonial system values. I am wont to say that the first archival Act of my country was written by white men, smoking cigars and drinking gin. My organization is still, in many ways, a colonial institution.

All this needs to change.

This desire is prompted by the acknowledgement of past injustices and from the recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to live in accordance with their traditions and culture, to find their own way of embodying their distinct human experience. Doing our part towards the fulfilment of this objective is what we should strive to achieve.



Decolonizing our relationship with indigenous peoples means, among other things, consulting them on what we are doing rather than taking an arrogant “We, the government, know what you need and what is best for you” stance.

Therefore, we should be committed to consulting indigenous representatives on every aspect of our work in relation to indigenous cultures. Discussions should be about how they wish to be consulted and involved, what we intend to do and how we intend to do it.

Reconciliation must be a long-term undertaking on the part of our institutions and must start in the minds and hearts of us all. It will take time, it could be unsettling, not everybody will follow at the same pace and some might not follow at all. But we must stay strong, because it is the right and long overdue thing to do.

To my mind, reconciliation without an in-depth modification of the colonial system does not mean much. We have to transform our past passive or imperialistic relations into dynamic relationships.

So much needs to change, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples need to work together to decolonize all the processes involved in their relationships and develop proper protocols. Non-indigenous people and organizations need to learn to share, to understand they are no better, that they are simply different and that coexistence and new partnerships based on mutual knowledge, respect and humility are the way for a better future.

Things must change and it is about time.

It is time to SEE, HEAR and WALK with indigenous peoples. It is time to stop being colonial agents and become agents of change by learning to share the power.