

JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM STATEMENT

I know my message; my tone will be slightly different from most of you attending this Cree Justice Symposium, some might say that I am being cynical for the words I am about to speak. Most came here to ensure that criminals in our Nation are put behind bars; I understand your concerns and objective.

However, I feel compelled to share some of my thoughts with you.

I often wonder why leaders, institutions and society continue to do things in reverse; the justice system is perhaps an example of us doing things in reverse. We spend so much money on law enforcement, lawyers, prosecuting people, putting people behind bars then we do in trying to prevent crimes before they happen. Our communities would be safer if we challenged ourselves to find ways to prevent crimes. Too often; we are a Nation which reacts to yesterday's news and events, instead we should be a Nation proactive to meet the challenges of tomorrow and the future.

A huge majority of the crimes committed in our communities are committed by people who fell into the cracks; many commit these crimes because every day is a struggle for them. Many come from very poor homes; a majority of them are probably unemployed. For many; the only real family they have is their gang members. Many times; even after they have served time for the crimes they committed; we cannot look beyond their troubled past, so we deny them opportunities.

I believe that we as a Nation, we have the opportunity to form a different kind of law enforcement and judicial process. We also have the unique opportunity to bring Hope to many whose lives are full of violence and despair. I do not believe we should necessarily model our law enforcement and justice system like the rest of the World.

Here are a few reasons why I do not believe we should necessarily model our law enforcement and justice system like the rest of the World; most especially the United States.

According to the United Nations, in 2008, the total military spending worldwide was \$1.473 trillion dollars; \$ 711 billion (48%) came from the United States. I believe we spend way too much to try and police the World.

In 2007, the United States spent 51.8% of their budget on National Defence, National Security, Law Enforcement, Department of Justice and funding the Wars.

- 6.3% went into Education;
- 5.6% went into Health Care;
- 2.9% went into Social Programs;
- 2.6% went into Science, Energy & Environment.

Yet, we wonder why there is an ongoing Global Economic Crises.

- Yet, an estimated 1.1 billion people (1/5) of the World population are living on less than \$1 a day;
- 1/6 of the world population is living in extreme poverty;
- 800 million people go hungry each day;
- Over 100 million primary age kids cannot go to school;
- Each year, more than 8 million people around the world die because they are too poor to stay alive.

But, who are we holding accountable for this injustice? How come no one is being put behind bars for these crimes on humanity?

How can we bring Social Justice and Equality to millions of people living in poverty? Based on definitions established by the World Bank, nearly 3 billion people—half of the world's populations—are considered poor.

Programming is another serious discussion we need to have; too many times we allow the television, the internet and others to program even our own children; our children and our youth often catch us off guard with how much hatred they have for others and how much they hate even their own lives. This happens when we allow others to opportunity to program and instil values in our children. We cannot expect our leaders to turn off our children's televisions set and computers; this is our responsibility.

Too often we use fear mongering tactics to program even our own children, we even teach them to be afraid of the police. Even a black police uniform can send chills down the spine for some; perhaps because we were programmed to think that black is the color of darkness. We have to learn to be honest about the realities and the challenges we face.

When people are living in fear; it hinders their development. Fear limits their mind-set and awareness, perhaps this is a reason why so many never come close to reaching their full potential. When we live with fear in our lives; we often allow others the opportunity to take control of us and take control of our fate. We have to learn to always encourage each other, we have to learn to be proud in who we are. We have the opportunity to change our frequency; re-program ourselves to use the Power of positive thinking.

Here is what our leaders can do; they need to be more conscious and be aware of the decisions that they make. Even the simplest decision can sometimes cause great harm on the people they serve. But, we as the people; we also have a responsibility in this; we have the great responsibility of holding them accountable.

But our most important responsibility is “becoming the change we want to see”. Every new day; we are given a new opportunity to create the World as it should be. Now is the time to awaken a young Nation, our Nation; especially our young people hold so much promise and Hope. Our Nation’s greatest chapter still awaits us. Together, Let us begin writing what will be our greatest chapter.

In conclusion, these past few months; the word “CHANGE” is a word we often heard. I believe in change; but I also believe in values and principles; Core values and principles like Respect, Trust, Courage, Gratitude, Pride, Culture, Language, Education, Humility, Love and Hope. The World will continue to forever change around us; but we must ensure our Nation’s future will be written based on these values and principles.

Daniel Mark-Stewart
Activist