

Ten minutes is not much for a subject as complex and indeed edifying as this one, because it is always interesting to talk about this and see how these exchanges take place and how aboriginal peoples try to negotiate with us, because these negotiations are based both on tradition and the modern way of doing things. However, I have decided to concentrate on symbols in my speech, because aboriginal peoples use many symbols. I would like to talk to you about one which has my particular interest: wampum.

So what is wampum? There are several definitions. And although there is more than one definition, there is one that I find particularly interesting and I would like to expand on that.

Wampum refers to white and black beads, often strung together in parallel strands. At the time, especially in the seventeenth century, trade was very important. Often trading between the settlers and those who had been there for 25,000 years took the form of an exchange of presents, and wampum was something that was very important to them.

The origin of the word is Algonquian. I have here an interpretation of wampum which we are sometimes given on the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. I tend to agree with this interpretation. Several chiefs came to explain what it meant, and I think wampum has both an historical and a contemporary connotation. I think that what is explained and interpreted in the wampum beads has an entirely modern application today.

So I will read what wampum means to most of the native chiefs, and this is the interpretation I attach the most meaning to. It goes as follows: "Our relations are not those of father and son, but of brothers. These two rows"—these are the two rows of beads I mentioned earlier—"represent boats sailing together on the same river. One belongs to the original people"—those who were here before us—"with their laws and customs, and the other to the European people, with their laws and customs. We travel together, but in our own boats. Neither shall try to steer the boat of the other".

I find this is very representative of the relations between us, the Europeans, and the native peoples. Naturally, I would add that we must not try to sink each other's boat, either. So we understand the symbolic importance.

In the 17th century, wampum meant a lot to the officers of the British crown, with whom gifts were exchanged. It was a very popular gift.

As is the case today, the more gifts there were, the more the exchange was important. Even today, I am offered gifts every time I visit certain reserves in Canada and Quebec—with very

few exceptions. For our part, we also developed the habit of bringing along some little offering to give them.

• (1800)

In many cases, the size or number of gifts is not as important as the symbolic value of maintaining this tradition of gift-giving. This allows a fruitful exchange with Aboriginal peoples because their traditions are being respected.

Although the Europeans knew that the wampum was a symbol of commitment, it seems that these commitments were not honoured. People must be made aware of this, and this awareness campaign could take place on June 21.

We denounced the old South African government over the issue of apartheid. I find it outrageous that in a country as open as Canada is at this time, there are still 635 reserves. We are ghettoizing these people by confining them to parcels of land. We took away between 90 per cent and 95 per cent of their lands, making billions of dollars in the process, in return for a social contract under which they were often set aside, ignored or shunted off to lands that were not even productive. We said in the social contract that we would look after them.

I think that if June 21 is ever designated as Aboriginal Solidarity Day, we should consider the impact of this legislation and the importance of dismantling it as soon as possible. Canada has had this law for 100 years and that is 100 years too many.

I also want to say a few words about June 21. This is an important date that was not chosen inadvertently. June 21 is the day of the solstice, that is, the longest day of the year. This is not just in Canada. Throughout the world, aboriginal peoples often celebrate this particular day. I was in Cancun, for instance, and I can certify that the Mayas, when they built their pyramids, were very much aware of the solstice.

On the longest day of the year, at a given moment, you can see a snake come down from the pyramid in Chichen Itza, the snake being, of course, a symbol of the longest day. The snake comes down from the pyramid at six o'clock in the evening, I believe, and often these temples and pyramids are built to mark the occurrence of the solstice. So June 21 is a very important date, and I think that if we decide on a national day, it should be June 21.

Finally, this is a day on which we should try and mix European and aboriginal cultures as much as possible. In a way this has already happened. The minister mentioned examples of food, of ways in which we exchange items, but there is also other aspects. If we take certain details of our daily lives as Europeans, for instance, what could be nicer than to go tobogganing with our children. Now the toboggan was invented by the aboriginal people, along with canoes, snowshoes, certain items