

Watchay, Chelsea Edwards Nishe necasoowin.

Greetings, my name is Chelsea Edwards. I'm sixteen years old and I'm a Cree from Attawapiskat First Nation. I am so honored to be here as a representative on behalf of First Nation children and youth in Canada. I am here today to talk to you about the inequalities that are happening to the indigenous peoples of Canada.

In 2010 youth began the largest youth driven human rights movement in Canadian history. This movement, is introduced into the House of Commons, known as Motion 571, by my local MP Charlie Angus.

Shannen's Dream calls on the Canadian federal government to close underfunding gaps of First Nations schools on reserve. This campaign was inspired by my best friend Shannen Koostachin who was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. But unfortunately, Shannen is not here with me today, but she's here in spirit as I continue her journey for educational rights, as she passed away at the age of fifteen in June 2010.

I want to share with you where it all began before the campaign. In the late 1960s, approximately 50,000 litres of diesel fuel contaminated the grounds of J.R. Nakogee elementary school on my reserve. It wasn't until the year 2000 that parents realized that their children were suffering because of illnesses caused by the toxic fumes. This was 40 years later and the spill was still not cleaned up. In 2000, the former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs placed us in what they call "temporary" portables that were placed a couple feet beside the toxic brownfield. Those "temporary" make-shift portables still exists till this day, that is 13 years

later. I want you to imagine going to school on a daily basis and having to see mice running around your lunch room which also happens to be right beside the washroom which is also where all your classes are. Imagine walking in temperatures that drop as low as -40C just to get from portable to portable in extreme weather conditions. Imagine sitting in a portable all day with poor insulation, drafty windows and broken doors and trying to learn.

As years went on Shannen Koostachin realized that this wasn't a school and she convinced her classmates that this wasn't what all Canadians citizens experience. The fight for Attawapiskat became the fight for first nations children.

Knowing that across Canada, there are 47 first nations communities that are in need of educational facilities which don't include renovations. There are children going to school in tents, portables, schools that don't even have running water and some that are infested by snakes and mice. The Canadian government understands that this is happening and they are currently underfunding the education of children on reserve by \$3000 per student compared to students off-reserve. This is violation of our basic rights to education as stated in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.

In order to have an education you have to go off reserve unfunded. In my case I have to go hundreds of miles away from home to get my proper secondary school education because I know that I have a higher chance of getting accepted into post secondary education. I want to go into the fields of law and human rights for children because no child should ever have to beg for equal rights nor should we be here pleading with the united nations to demand the Canadian government to

live up to their commitments. Like many children, we had to leave our parents, family, friends and our communities to go to school unfunded just to get a proper education. We have no choice because there are not enough resources on reserve to meet the standards of the proper curriculum needs. The government is not meeting their signed commitments of the rights of children.

I am here today to tell you to demand the federal government of Canada for us to receive proper facilities resources and the curriculum to First Nations children right where they are. I am here at an international level as funding is continuing to be cut and nothing is getting better for my people. As a result, young people are losing hope in their education and lives so they no longer attend school on a daily basis because the government is not investing or believing in them.

I want you to ask the Canadian government why First nations children are suffering in one of the most richest countries in the world? Why are we being treated like second-class citizens as if we were living in a third-world country? The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child has a strong principle for non-discrimination however my people are still strongly being discriminated against.

On a personal level based on my experience, I want to know why a child's life is cut short just by getting their proper education? I also want to know why First Nations children are facing various issues that range from child welfare, health care, youth justice and suicide.

Children get it, Shannen's Dream is now an international movement that is led by children and for children by why can't the Canadian government just listen to what we are saying and take action on our most basic rights.

As Shannen would say no one should ever have to walk in their moccasins again.  
Meegwetch, Thank you, Merci.