

Editor' Note: This is a transcription of the taped speech which was recorded during a telephone call from Kuujuuaq, Nunavik to Harwinton, Connecticut, courtesy of CBCNorth radio. Due to some small periods of electrical interference, not every word could be precisely heard. Regardless, we believe our transcription does not take Premier Charest's speech out of context or leave it vulnerable to misinterpretation.

**Quebec Premier JeanCharest's August 8, 2011
speech in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik
apologizing for the mid-20th century dog slaughters**

I want to recognize the members of the executive committee who have appeared here today and members of the community who have come out in numbers for this very important ceremony and this very important moment in the relationship between all of the people of Quebec and the Inuit people of Quebec and of Nunavik. Goeff Kelly told you the story a moment ago of our visit here in 2003. In fact we were here together in 1999 and in the new year that brought in a new century but also a reminder of how nature is tied to the future of men. It was, you remember, the year of the avalanche and the loss of a number of lives in this community. Both Goeff and I were in opposition at the time, but one of the things we remember is the strength of this extraordinary community that went through a very difficult event. As Goeff told you, in 2003 when we returned here with Pita and Maggie, we were in awe of the beauty of this part of Quebec and of the history and the story of the Inuit, and we were somewhat surprised and not informed of this issue of the slaughter of dogs that happened in the 1950s and the 1960s. It took us some time to understand how important this issue was. And it took us some time to try to understand what we needed to do to better deal with it. And so in 2007 we mandated a retired judge to examine this issue and he produced a report that I have with me today. And you see by the size of the report that it is very substantial because Judge Jean-Jacques Croteau visited fourteen communities to hear from Elders, to hear from men and women who had been part of or had heard the story of the dog slaughter so that he could produce a report that would allow us to be able to address this issue.

The report that he produced tells a story. The story it tells, without going into detail or doing justice to the story, essentially is this, that the federal government of the day had decided that there would be an obligation on every child within the Inuit community to go to school. And because of this obligation they would use the trading posts to establish schools and they would speak to every family so that every child would be forced to go to school. As a consequence of this position, the federal government of the day and other governments didn't really [feel it was important] that Inuit parents would not separate themselves from their children. And so they processed a nomad community becoming a more stable community, one that would be a sedentary community. As a consequence of that the Inuit community started to take root and the fourteen communities we know now in Quebec that we call Nunavik as part of the world. As a consequence of that, the communities that were nomad communities also were communities that lived with their dogs and had done so since the memory of the communities went back. And so the consequence of this was the establishment of the communities, the children, the parents and also the presence of these sled dogs. That in itself brought a whole new reality of how do we co-exist with these animals that were so important as a lifeline to the community.

Judge Croteau in his report, this is on page seven of his report, I want to read to you a study that he quoted entitled *The Inuit Dog: Its Provenance, Environment and History* and its author is Ian Kenneth MacRury of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge of Darwin College. The study was done in 1991. The study says this, "Dogs are the only domestic animal of the Inuit and have been essential to their survival since at least the beginning of the Thule period and perhaps for much longer. The Inuit Dog is foremost a draught animal used by the Inuit in their long distance hunting expeditions and when moving from one hunting location to another. The dogs are also companions and assistants essential to the Inuit in the hunting of seal, polar bear and musk ox." And then in the same study there's a quote that allows us to smile because it's figurative but it says, "A hunter without dogs can be considered half a hunter." And he put that quote in to sort of exemplify, I guess, the importance of the dogs to the community and the culture of the Inuit. What ensued in the 1950s and 60s was between the men and the women who were here on behalf of the government and Inuit and was a profound misunderstanding, a misunderstanding on how the dogs should be treated, the relationship that they had, the historical, very deep-rooted relationship with the Inuit people not only in terms of symbols but in terms of hunting and for the life blood of the community. And what happened was government mandated people were asked to execute a certain job of controlling the dogs and putting them in a controlling environment that was unfamiliar to that of the Inuit. Those men and women executed the mandate that was given to them by government. They did it out of good faith. And as they did so, they created a very, very real grievance for the Inuit people. And they went on to slaughter a number of dogs and that would have a very important trauma, caused a trauma to the Inuit people from Nunavik.

It took us a long time to be able to recognize this trauma. It took us a long time because we only started a few years ago to put the relationship between the Inuit people and all the people of Quebec at the level it should be at, a level of recognition, and of respect of the differences of others so that our relationship is that what it should be, one not only of citizenship, of friendship, of recognition and respect. Sometimes men and women take time to learn these things. The important thing is that we do learn. A big part of today's ceremony is an act of respect to the Inuit people of Quebec on behalf of the government of Quebec who speaks for all the people of Quebec. Today as the Premier of Quebec and as the one who speaks on behalf of all of the people of Quebec I want to express our regret. I want to express the apology of the people of Quebec for the trauma that was caused on the men and women of the Inuit nation who were hurt by the institution in the 50s. I want to say that from the bottom of my heart that we need to learn from what happened so that as we move forward in our relationship and we close the chapter from these sad events that we learn from each other and that we learn in our relationship so that never again something like this should happen, that we should forever look at each other with affection, with a sense of common destiny and with a sense of respect for the differences, for our culture and for what we bring to this world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to speak to all of you and I want to speak to all of those listening on radio in fourteen communities around Nunavik. I want us to mark this day on our calendar together because the relationship of the people of Quebec and the Inuit will never be the same after today. It shall forever be marked by the will of recognition and respect for each other. Thank you very much for being here today and for listening to me.