



# DENENDEH PAPAL VISIT COMMITTEE

BOX 345,  
FORT SIMPSON, N.W.T.  
XOE ONO

WELCOMING REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF HIS  
HOLINESS, POPE JOHN PAUL 11 TO CANADA'S ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLES AT FORT SIMPSON, DENENDEH

by Stephen Kakwfi  
National Host  
Dene Nation

Your Holiness, your Excellencies and the Reverend Fathers of the Holy Church, it is a special privilege to welcome you to Denendeh, our homeland. It is an honor to welcome our Indian, Inuit and Metis brothers and sisters from the Four Directions, who have joined with us in Ft. Simpson to celebrate this special day. We invite Canadians and the people of the world to share this special occasion with us. A warm welcome to those who are watching this historic event on television.

The Dene and the four national aboriginal organizations extended an invitation to the Holy Father upon hearing that His Holiness wished to meet with the native peoples of Canada within our homeland. Our first attempt in 1984 was prevented by fog, however, the Holy Father, promised to return and that promise has been fulfilled today.

The aboriginal people of Canada have, for thousands and thousand of years, lived in close harmony with the lands, the waters and the animals of the earth. We believe that through the work of our ancestors, men and women, with the help of the animals, our land has been prepared for all living creatures--plant, animal, spirit and man. We believe that those who prepared the lands are still with us today.

The aboriginal peoples were created as distinct peoples within the world community and were blessed by the Creator. Our holistic spirituality has helped us to survive the many changes we have undergone throughout our history.

We have faced many barriers from the tragic sicknesses and disease brought to our people with the coming of the Europeans, to the enforcement of foreign laws and the encroachment of massive resource development.

New threats to our way of life, such as the global anti-harvest movement, are having a destructive impact on our traditional life with the land.

But, even after these long years of struggle we maintain our determination to survive and we have seen the evolution of a new spirit and strength amongst our people.

We are deeply honored by this visit your Holiness. We know the world will recognize, through your blessings, the special place the Creator has provided for the aboriginal peoples within the family of man. This visit to our land with our people, has provided the spiritual guidance and support our people need to carry us through these turbulent but challenging times. May we continue to be blessed in the future as we are today.

As Nations, we gather then as family in friendship, the Inuit, the Métis and other First Nations in celebration of the life given to each of us, in thanksgiving and to commemorate the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Denendeh.

Mussi Cho