

FRANCOIS PAULETTE

A Denesuline and member of the Smith's Landing Treaty 8 First Nation, Francois Paulette survived the residential school system before going on to become the youngest Chief in the NWT Indian Brotherhood in 1971. In 1972, along with sixteen other chiefs from the Mackenzie Valley, he challenged the Crown to recognize treaty rights and aboriginal title to over 450,000 square miles of land in the historic *Paulette* case. He remains a passionate and outspoken advocate of treaty and indigenous rights in all matters affecting his people, and is recognized in the courts as an expert witness on historic treaties.

As Chief Negotiator for the Smith's Landing First Nation, Francois worked diligently to conclude a Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement, which has proven to be of critical importance in protecting the Slave River from hydro-electric development.

Francois takes pride in maintaining his Dene language and the traditional knowledge that derives from his close relationship with the land. He was one of the founding members of the Dene Cultural Institute, and continues to serve as an interpreter of traditional knowledge and a facilitator of cross-cultural understanding. As a collaborator on a number of Canadian and international documentary films, he has helped to increase public understanding of the Dene way of life (Dene Ch'anie), and has participated in ecumenical forums, including the Parliament of the World's Religions, to promote and understanding of the spiritual world of the Dene.

François remains active in efforts to protect the natural environment of Denendeh. He has contributed to numerous water conferences in the north and has been a collaborator on several documentary films focusing on the impact of the tar sands development on the environment and peoples of northern Canada. Over a period of nine years, he participated in annual meetings of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) on Climate Change, in various locations around the globe and contributed to the Indigenous Peoples' Traditional Knowledge articles of the Paris Agreement. As a past member of the Assembly of First Nations Elders Council, Francois was instrumental in the development of traditional knowledge protocols and policy for the Canadian Ministry of Climate Change and the Environment.

Francois has extensive experience as a guest lecturer at institutions such as Aurora College, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, and the Monk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto. He is currently an Adjunct Professor at the School of Public Health, University of Alberta. He is an Elder Advisor to the Institute of Circumpolar Health Research (ICHR) and to the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation.

He has recently been named an Officer of the Order of Canada. Ultimately, however, his well-being and strength continue to derive from his relationships with family and the ancestral lands of the Denesuline.