



**First Nations Language Keepers Gathering**  
**Keynote Address**  
**Diom Roméo Saganash**

**Title:** Language & Nationhood

**Keynote:** Diom Roméo Saganash

**Biography:** Diom Roméo Saganash is the Member of Parliament for Abitibi-Baie James-Nunavik-Eeyou. Romeo's story is not typical - values from the Eeyou Cree, a childhood spent in the forests of Northern Quebec, a survivor of Indian Residential School, hard work and education to become the first Indigenous lawyer from the Université du Québec à Montréal law school and a lifetime working to uphold human rights. Romeo was born on the shores of a lake in his parents' tent because his parents lived a traditional lifestyle; the only language he heard and spoke for the first seven years of his life was Cree. After he finished residential school, Romeo was asked by his Chief to attend a conference on the 10th anniversary of the signing of the first modern treaty in Canada: the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. It was there that his love for the law began. His accomplishments are many: he was one of the principal authors of La Paix des Braves – a landmark agreement between the James Bay Cree and the Government of Quebec – and he has been a key negotiator for many national and international initiatives, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Romeo founded the Cree Nation Youth Council in 1985, served as Deputy Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Cree for a number of years. A passionate environmentalist, Romeo served as vice-chair of the Cree Regional Authority and Chair of the James Bay Advisory Committee on the Environment. His work in the economic sector with Creeco Inc. and the Eeyou Co. showed his understanding of how to balance our duty as stewards of the land with sustainable economic growth. Romeo has a son and two daughters and three grandchildren.

**Abstract:** Diom Roméo Saganash MP is a Member of Parliament for the Quebec riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. During his time as MP, Romeo Saganash addressed the House of Commons entirely in Cree without translation. He is pushing to make it possible for Indigenous members of Parliament to speak their own languages in the House of Commons and have them translated into English and French. It would be an important recognition of the historical role of Indigenous peoples in Canada and a gesture of respect for their culture and heritage. It would allow First Nations MPs to speak out in their own voices and be fully understood. He asserts that speaking Indigenous languages is both a constitutional and a human right. He also pushes and fights for Indigenous cultural rights, nationhood and self-determination. Reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians will be a long journey, one that consists of many steps, both large and small.

**Learning Outcomes:** Participants will:

- Be inspired as he shares his journey as a Cree speaker in his life and work.