



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

A REPORT ON THE VISION FOR THE ASINABKA NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CENTRE

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS REPORT

**PRESENTED BY
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**Information on the Asinabka/Victoria Island/Chaudière Site
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SECTION 1: MESSAGE

A. Message from William Commanda, Algonquin Elder, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, Hon. Phd., OC

I present a report on the mandate, vision, plans and priorities for the development of the **Asinabka National Indigenous Centre** on Victoria Island, at the Sacred Chaudière Site in the heart of the National Capital Region, as it has developed in consultation with Algonquin, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals parties during the past thirteen years.

With the exception of one Elders' Gathering, and funds provided by Heritage Canada to the National Capital Commission to articulate the vision in a draft memorandum and advance the development of the architectural plans in 2004, this work has been entirely unfunded.

Ottawa sits on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Peoples, and this confluence of the Ottawa, Rideau and Gatineau Rivers has long served as the sacred meeting grounds of my ancestors. *Asinabka*, the sacred heartland, also a cultural landscape of national historic significance, includes the Chaudière Rapids, Chaudière Island and Victoria Island.

A multi-faceted vision has been developed to revitalize this special gathering place. Its core objective is to advance healing at three fundamental levels:

Healing individual and collective relationships with Mother Earth;
Healing, strengthening and unifying Indigenous Peoples; and
Healing relationships with all others.

We propose the establishment of the **Asinabka National Indigenous Centre**. It is envisioned as a site to provide spiritual sanctuary and to advance dialogue on healing and strengthening Indigenous Peoples; to showcase the culture and heritage of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples in a world class setting of interest and relevance to local residents and national and international visitors; and to serve as a think tank for environmental stewardship and peace building.

Its manifestation will constitute a dynamic, dramatic, and inspirational statement to the world and ignite a prayer for *Sustainable Relationships* and hope into the future.

I am grateful to the spirits of my ancestors, and to the many people who have helped inspire, develop and advance this work over the years. I know this effort will move and serve many people in upcoming years.

SECTION II:

ASINABKA NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CENTRE

A. Mandate

Inspired by the ancient sacred Indigenous Wampum Belts, the mandate for the **Asinabka National Indigenous Centre** is multi-fold:

- To inspire respectful and responsible choice for sustainable relationships guided by values of sharing, balance and harmonious co-existence, at these times of global crisis anticipated by the ancient *Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt*;
- To renew and celebrate the Indigenous spirit of welcome and sharing as inscribed in the *Three Figure Wampum Belt* from the 1700s;
- To celebrate freedom and interconnection consistent with the spiritual laws of nature and the great circle of life; and
- To honour First Peoples whose values and heritage have contributed substantially and positively to the evolution of Canada since its inception, and who still serve as the glue to hold a diverse society together.

B. Mission

To vitalize and celebrate a strong, unified Indigenous presence in the sacred heart of the country, inspiring a passion for environmental stewardship and peace-building, consistent with the deep understanding of the central ancestral prayer of the land: *Ginawaydaganuc, We Are All Connected*, thereby ensuring a sustainable future for the *Seven Generations*.

C. Goal

The establishment of a National Indigenous Centre in the National Capital Region, which will ensure the recognition, celebration and visibility of a strong Indigenous presence, culture, values and voice in the fabric of Canadian society; the creation of a culture of inclusion and sustainable relationships; and the animation of a *Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*.

SECTION III:

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A. Core Objective

To reawaken indigenous ideology to advance healing at three fundamental levels:

Healing individual and collective relationships with Mother Earth;
Healing, strengthening and unifying Indigenous Peoples; and
Healing relationships with all others.

B. Strategic Plan

A two-pronged plan is envisioned to achieve this three level objective of healing:

1. Construct a National Centre for Indigenous Peoples to:
 - Support the reclamation, development and sharing of innovative ideas designed to contribute to the healing of Indigenous Peoples and strengthening of communities in such fundamental areas as substance abuse, physical, mental and sexual abuse, suicide and self identity crises;
 - Promote the reclamation, retention and revitalization of language, education, culture, restorative justice practices, sustainable traditions and ways of life;
 - Unite and strengthen Aboriginal peoples in the spirit of the inherent Indigenous birthright of interconnectedness (*We Are All Related*);
 - Promote environmental stewardship and reclaim ways of living in balance with Mother Earth;
 - Celebrate a vibrant, visible Indigenous presence in the National Capital Region.
2. Establish a Peace Building Program for all, dedicated to sharing Indigenous values and ideology with non-Aboriginal peoples, by providing an eco-forum for:
 - Policy development in social justice and biodiversity to improve the lives of all Canadians and build a sustainable legacy for future generations;
 - Advocacy on behalf of Mother Earth;
 - Cross cultural training and experiential programs;
 - Promotion of inter-cultural understanding and racial harmony;
 - Serving as a resource base for national and international peace-building;
 - Sharing and celebrating Aboriginal culture, traditions and ways of knowing;
 - Assuming an active and visible position within the fabric of society and in its continued evolution.

C. Priorities and Planning Considerations

The key priorities for each component of the overall plan are envisioned as processes, programs or spaces. Together they constitute a living ecosystem from which Indigenous ideology can retrench on the sacred land and take its rightful place in the governance and values of this land. Women and men and young people will be actively involved in developing and animating the vision for the centre with the Elders.

CIRCLE OF NATIONS SPIRITUAL HEALING CENTRE TO UNIFY AND STRENGTHEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	PEACE BUILDING CENTRE FOR ALL NATIONS, TO SHARE THE VALUES AND IDEOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
Spiritual/Ceremonial Centre and Elders' Gathering Place	Peace building/environmental stewardship 'Think Tank'
Cultural Revival - Arts, Crafts Studio space; Museum/Gallery	Cultural Sharing/Racial Harmony
Language Resource Centre	Conference Centre
Resource Centre/Campus for Aboriginal University/College Students in the capital city	Think Tank/Meeting Space in natural environment within the city to facilitate deep reflection
Healing Centre/Meeting Centre	Auditorium/Concert Hall
Archives/Library/Historic Research Centre	Accommodations
Medicines/Gardens/Greenhouse	United Nations Meeting Space
Youth/Children Creative Space	Children's/Youth Museum
Traditional Knowledge/Ideology Animation	Restaurant/Gift Store
Research/Planning/Education	Museum/Gallery

Critical Planning Considerations

1. To create a setting to provide spiritual sanctuary; to advance dialogue on healing and strengthening Indigenous Peoples; to serve as a comprehensive resource base and clearing house of innovative Indigenous ideas, programs and initiatives; to serve as a living school of wisdom, art and creativity; to house historical archival materials for the retention, study, promotion and celebration of indigenous history, ideology and knowledge; and to serve as a resource centre for Aboriginal students in the capital city and beyond;
2. To showcase the culture and heritage of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples in a world class setting of interest and relevance to local residents and national and international visitors;
3. To serve as a vibrant gathering place for Indigenous Peoples and others;
4. To create an environment conducive to critical and creative exploration of local, national and global priorities for environmental stewardship and sustainability;
5. To create an environment for Indigenous Peoples to share their knowledge of relationship-building and circle dialogue developed over millennia to advance racial harmony and peace building in a country now called upon to advance and celebrate human diversity;
6. To protect, reclaim and enhance the natural environment to the fullest extent possible, and to repatriate Indigenous species of plants and animals;
7. To develop the site in accordance with its natural, physical, symbolic, cultural, historical, and political importance within the National Capital Region.

D. Expected Key Results

1. Sharing and strengthening strategies for healing and social development programs;
2. Creation of an environment conducive to healing of relationships amongst First Peoples, First Nations, Inuit and Metis, on reserves and in urban and rural areas;
3. Creation of space for art studios and creative activities;
4. Creation of space for the showcasing of art and culture of First Nations, Inuit and Metis;
5. Increased visibility of Indigenous Peoples in the National Capital Region and country;
6. Establishment of archives, and creation of an environment and resource base to support researchers and students in universities and colleges in the national capital region and beyond;
7. Incremental improvements in the socio/economic/health conditions of Indigenous Peoples, consistent with the ideals of the *Three Figure Wampum Belt* and principles of sharing and confederacy, in fair recognition of birth rights to land and resources;
8. Comprehensive articulation of Indigenous thoughts on global, environmental and social justice issues;
9. Greater understanding of Indigenous ideology and its tremendous importance to the key issues of the times – health, environmental stewardship and peace-building;
10. Understanding and affirmation of Indigenous history and rights amongst Canadians at large; and commitment to support their occupation of their rightful position as First Peoples of this land;
11. Celebration of Indigenous culture and heritage as *The Sacred Jewel in the Nation's Crown*;
12. Maturation and self-respect in the Canadian psyche.

E. Key Milestones to Date and Planned Activities for 2010

Of particular note in the chronology of recent development are the following items:

- 1998 Mandate from the Algonquin leadership to explore the feasibility of developing an Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Centre at Victoria Island;
- 2000 – 2003 Community Consultations;
- 2003 Development of the Elders' Comprehensive Vision;
- Annual *Circle of All Nations Workshops* to strengthen the vision;
- 2004 \$50,000 grant from Canadian Heritage for the preparation of a draft Memorandum of Recommendation and Level II Architectural Design Plans for the Indigenous Centre;
- 2006 affirmation of support by the National Capital Commission for the core vision;
- 2009 statement of endorsement to Parliament by Paul Dewar, MP; and
- Increasing community organization activities to support the Indigenous project.

For 2010, several strategies are being launched to advance the project:

- A revitalized communications strategy to build a groundswell of support;
- Ongoing outreach to federal and other political leadership;
- The development of a “friends of” type foundation and a complementary fundraising strategy;
- An Algonquin River Watershed community consultation project developed with support from Ministry of Culture and City of Ottawa;
- University/college/community/church/business/environment group studies, video productions, research papers and outreach;
- Development of strategic educational and partnership initiatives with local Universities;
- Researching and developing governance structures and protocols.

F. Summary of Proposed Preliminary Implementation Plans:

Key Initiatives

1. Revitalized communications strategy for continued promotion of the core vision for the Indigenous Centre to Indigenous Communities, and others, locally, nationally and internationally, through spokespersons, partnerships, presentations and workshops, videos, radio, website, internet, facebook, and twitter outreach campaigns;
2. Mobilizing support within the Federal Government by MPs Paul Dewar and Mauril Belanger, local MPs with key responsibility in the area, and for Aboriginal constituencies; the former has already made a formal statement in this regard and launched a media campaign – see www.pauldewar.ca, and email your message of support to DewarP@parl.gc.ca; Ongoing outreach to government leaders;
3. Creating a Foundation to focus on fund raising for the Indigenous Centre; this will be a two-fold initiative, involving the establishment of a registered charitable “*friends of*” foundation and the development of a complementary fund-raising strategy. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples will be invited to serve on an Honorary Council for the Foundation;
4. Setting as a first goal for the Foundation, the securing of a minimum of \$10m to commence Phase I – to establish an Indigenous Not for Profit Organization/Operating body to complete development of potential programming; preliminary and conceptual design; detailed capital and operating costing; and articles and by-laws for the Indigenous operating body;
5. Development of a complementary project management body and structure to oversee the construction phase of the initiative, comprised of Indigenous/federal/other representatives;
6. Organization of developmental workshops for the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed to strengthen strategic alliances and establish protocols to serve as the host community for the National Indigenous Centre; and to initiate strategic partnerships with local Urban Aboriginal organizations, National Aboriginal organizations, and other key players to develop governance structures and prepare to operationalize Phase I; and
7. Phase II will entail the construction of the building and the hiring of staff to implement programs and operate the facility.