

**ALGONQUIN ELDERS' GATHERING**  
**TO DEVELOP A VISION FOR VICTORIA ISLAND**  
**MARCH 27 – 28, 2002**  
**CHATEAU LODGE MANIWAKI, QUEBEC**

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***A Circle of All Nations – A Culture of Peace***

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**VICTORIA ISLAND HEALING CENTRE**

**AN ELDERS' GATHERING TO DEVELOP A VISION FOR A HEALING AND  
PEACEBUILDING CENTRE AT VICTORIA ISLAND**

**DATE 27 – 28, MARCH, 2002**

**PLACE Chateau Lodge, MANIWAKI, QUEBEC**

**AGENDA Wednesday, 27 March 2002**

am Travel

2.00 pm Opening Ceremonies

Elder William Commanda's Remarks

Gilbert Whiteduck, FNCCEC

Douglas Cardinal's Presentation

3.30 pm Coffee

4.00 pm Questions and Comments

5.30 pm Dinner

7.30 pm Pipe Ceremony at Elder Commanda's Lodge

Informal Discussions and  
Reflection

**Thursday, 28, 2002**

8.00 am Breakfast

9.00 am Opening Prayer

Circle discussion

10.30 am Coffee

11.00 am Closing Circle

1.00 pm Lunch

2.30 pm Travel

## **BACKGROUND**

Victoria Island has been the traditional spiritual meeting grounds of the Algonquin peoples for countless centuries. Over the past decade, Aboriginal peoples have reclaimed their right to bring ceremony and gatherings back to this land, and many individuals and groups, both Algonquin and non Algonquin, have held meetings and sacred ceremonies on the Island, retrenching the indigenous spirit in its soil.

Algonquin Elder William Commanda notes that the Algonquin peoples have been entrusted with the guardianship of the Sacred Seven Fires Wampum Belt for a very long time, and he notes that the world finally stands at the cross roads of time when the final message of the Belt is unfolding. It is time for all to make serious choices about our future on Mother Earth and our relationships with each other.

At this time, a long term vision for Victoria Island's future is emerging.

Several years ago, Elder Commanda and Firekeeper Peter Decontie approached Algonquin community leaders regarding the building of a healing centre on Victoria Island; five communities expressed their support in writing. Aboriginal Architect Douglas Cardinal developed conceptual designs for such a centre. During the past fall, Elder William Commanda and Douglas Cardinal, of their own accord, visited many Algonquin communities to seek input on this matter, and were greatly encouraged by the interest in and support for such a vision, expressed by both old and young people. FNCCEC (First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Educational Centres) Elder Joe Wabie assisted with some of these early community visits. Approximately a hundred people have affirmed this support in writing. The Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation (Abitibiwinini, Eagle Village, Kitchisdakik, Kitigan Zibi, Lac Simon, Long Point) passed a resolution endorsing the initiative in November 2001. It is understood that support at other levels is also strengthening.

The time is ripe to develop and advance this vision, consistent with views of the Elders and peoples of the territory and the sacred prophecy.

Preliminary ideas for the focus of such a centre include individual and community healing, spirituality, healing of Mother Earth and environment and sustainable development issues, substance abuse treatment, language retention, arts and crafts, cultural revival and retention, indigenous education, youth empowerment, healing programs for offenders, anti-racism, nation to nation peace building; that is, programs and processes that can lead to individual and group healing, development and peace.

## **THE LAND SPEAKS**

### **Some Reflections of Elder William Commanda**

It is said that the land retains her memories of her purpose and history and only if we listen to her very attentively will we be able to hear her whisperings.

This is of course because Mother Earth is alive, and now more than ever she needs us to listen to her. She is warning us of the grave times we face, physically and spiritually; she is warning us of the urgent need for her children to come together, recognizing our common reality; she is warning us that now, more urgently than ever before, we need to come together with one heart, one mind and one determination to transform our lives, our relationships and our world.

But of course, the Anicinabe people have known the truth of her message for hundreds of years, from the prophecies relayed by countless generations dating back to the misty origins of precontact times. These prophecies are not unlike the prophecies and legends and predictions of indigenous peoples, visionaries and the formal religions of the world.

The Algonquin peoples have been entrusted with sacred wampum belt of the Seven Fires Prophecy for a long, long time, and we finally stand the cross roads of time when the final message of the Belt is unfolding. Maybe our ancestral spirits knew we would need to bring this message before the whole world. Maybe this is why our world is now called the global village. And maybe this is why, after five hundred years of silence, the voice of the indigenous peoples is rising again. Mother Earth is telling us, the indigenous peoples who were given the sacred responsibility as her caretakers, that it is time for us to resume our duty to uphold the sacredness of all life. We have been silent too long. Wait much longer; and it will be too late.

Our ancestors are the Mamuwini, the nomads; I am Mamuwini. We comprise eighty four nations, dispersed from the East far into the West in this North American continent. We moved across the continent on our birch bark canoes as the winds and the waters and the clouds move; as the birds fly; as the animals roam – beyond the knowledge of borders. And as we traveled, we touched and were touched by all. And we knew we were responsible to all whose paths we cross – the trees, the winds, the waters, the birds and the animals.

It is time for us to reclaim our heritage and for all to hear this message of responsibility from us.

The Algonquin peoples were a nomadic people who traveled lightly over the lands and waterways of North America. We had summer trapping grounds and winter hunting grounds, and we also gathered on special islands in the waterways across the vast

expanses of land, for community meetings, council, exchanges, marriage making, burials and ceremony.

Victoria Island was one such place of power on the Ottawa River. We are told that it served as the spiritual meeting grounds for our ancestors, and over the past ten years the land has been reminding us of its sacred purpose.

And people from near and far have been hearing the call of the Island. Anicinabe peoples have begun to recall and reclaim their sacred spiritual heritage, and we have taken small steps to bring prayer and ceremony and honour back to the Island.

It is now time for us all to take a big step forward to advance a vision for healing and peace consistent with the message of the Seven Fires Prophecy.

The vision takes concrete form as we work together to establish a lodge dedicated to healing and peace building for all nations, at Victoria Island, and support the land as it reclaims its heritage as the traditional spiritual meeting grounds of the Anicinabe peoples.

## **THE VISION FOR VICTORIA ISLAND**

### **A Note by Douglas J. Cardinal**

William Commanda is one of the Elders we consulted in 1990 for the development of the Victoria Island concept. It was his wish and the wish of the Elders present that Victoria Island be a visible Aboriginal presence in Canada's capital. Since then, William Commanda and other Elders have continued on with their commitment in establishing a circle of forgiveness and healing on this historical gathering place, where they have come together to chart their path throughout their long history.

It is the site where Algonquin chiefs met with Queen Victoria's representatives, who presented each one of them medals and re-numeration for sharing the resources of the land. Queen Victoria promised they would only take the pines from the Ottawa Valley for their tall ships, and would leave everything else untouched for the Algonquin people. The great-grandfather of William Commanda, who is an Algonquin Elder and Keeper of the Seven Fires prophecy Wampum Belt, was one of the Algonquin chiefs at this ceremonial occasion.

As inscribed in the sacred wampum shell in the 1400s, it is time to re-establish the meeting circle of the Algonquin people on this site. It is essential to house the wealth of their knowledge that has been passed down from their ancestors. The people believe the Creator placed them in this area to protect, respect, and live in harmony with all the Creator's handiwork; the earth and animals who give them life; the trees and rivers for food, transportation, and protection; and the plants that provided food and medicine to heal them. They knew they had to share this place with all living beings, the water, rocks, trees, plants, and animals as well as live in harmony with all humanity.

The Algonquin people gained a wealth of knowledge based on living in harmony with nature and their own nature by following the Creator's wishes for thousands of years. They've developed a wealth of knowledge in knowing how to protect, and respect the natural environment. They understand all life is one and their way of being, insured their survival for thousands of years where they thrived as a people, and as a culture. They are a culture of peace, love, caring and harmony. This vast knowledge is not housed in books but in the oral traditions and teachings of their Elders. Elders are their books of knowledge and they want to share their knowledge with everyone who joins them in their circle on their traditional spiritual place Victoria Island. They will open their circle to all the Aboriginal nations in Canada and ask them to share in their vision. They will invite their Elders to share their vast knowledge and wisdom, as guardians of this vast land that the Creator has placed them there to live in harmony with his creation.

They will open their circle to include the knowledge, wisdom and contribution of all the Aboriginal people of the Americas and all around the world. They will dedicate themselves to develop a solid foundation for their children by passing on to them the wisdom and knowledge of their Elders that is their birthright. They will equip them with the knowledge they need to make a contribution in today's world so they will make it possible for their children to thrive in the future. They will embrace the contribution of all Aboriginal people, and welcome the opportunity of making a contribution to them. They will open their circle and share their knowledge and wisdom as guardians of this land with all the people that come here from all over the world. They come here to share their land and strive to make a better world for their children. They will dedicate themselves to share and teach all people from all nations who come to their circle the value of their knowledge and see their path as a valuable contribution to all members of the human family. Here they will create, "A Circle of All Nations and a Culture of Peace."

Many of the Elders, particularly William Commanda, not only see this building as an Aboriginal Centre but as a centre for all nations to come together in peace and harmony. As the Algonquin Keeper of the Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt, he states these difficult times we live in, were foreseen by spiritual visionaries across the world. His says his ancestors warned about this time and the choices they would have to make in the Seven Fires Prophecy, which was inscribed in the sacred wampum shell in the 1400s.

The prophecy holds a vision for a future where they are to honour their relationship and responsibility to Mother Earth and all creation; celebrate their individual gifts and diversity, and still recognize and respect their place within a Circle of All Nations.

He feels the steps to this future are few. First they are to look within, so they know themselves best; recognize, acknowledge and forgive themselves their shortcomings and any failure to achieve their best potential; forgive others for any hardship and pain they may have caused them and their communities, and trust that this energy will transform them spiritually; recognize that their thoughts, words, and actions affect themselves, Mother Earth, and all creation. They are to embrace peace mindfully, listen to their minds, but trust their hearts above all. He feels this path will lead them to love,

sharing, respect, responsibility, compassion, healing, justice and reconciliation. Included in this report, is the support William Commanda received in 1998 to have Victoria Island be a place where Elders would come and share their knowledge with their people and everyone who came to the circle.

Since my appointment by the NCC to develop the concept for Victoria Island, William Commanda and I have visited the Algonquin communities in Ontario and Quebec, and have received once again their support. We're enclosing a resolution passed by the Algonquin tribes and we're including signatures from the people who are continually coming on board. In our travels, we not only experienced support and enthusiasm from the Elders, but also the youth. The young people see the establishment of this centre as an imperative resource for their future.