



William Commanda's Remarks Upon Receipt of The Key to The City of Ottawa - June 21, 2006

I wish to thank His Worship, Mayor Bob Chiarelli for taking this courageous step of presenting me with the *Key* to the capital city of Canada. I am deeply moved to be honoured in this fashion on National Aboriginal Day. For me, this is as much an expression of understanding of my own individual efforts to work and serve my people, *all* the people who now reside on the land of my ancestors, as it is also an acknowledgement of the spirit of my ancestors and my Indigenous brothers and sisters. Thank you all for joining us today.

You may know that use of *symbol* is of great importance to Indigenous Peoples, guiding us to understandings of the bigger realities of life, and this gesture of the presentation of the *Key* to the heart of the country, the *thirteenth Key*, is of great symbolic significance to me.

For well over thirty years now, I have been the Keeper of Three Sacred Wampum Belts. These sacred relics of my ancestors hold messages of historic and spiritual importance for all peoples.




The youngest belt, the Jay Treaty Belt of 1793, the time before my country was divided, held the commitment for free movement across Turtle Island for my people. This Belt contains both genuine wampum and artificial Hudson Bay beads, foretelling the time when the borders would again dissolve.

In some respects, this message is ominous. But today, I see three levels of significance that makes me happy. The City of Ottawa is acknowledging someone from the City of Maniwaki; the Province of Ontario is reaching across to the Province of Quebec; and the National Capital Region, representing the entire country, is opening its heart to some one seen generally as belonging within the confines of a reserve, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. I see the spirit of borderlessness gaining strength. I see it as a symbol of hope.



I also carry the Three Figure Welcoming Belt, created in the 1700s, when my ancestors welcomed the newcomers, then the French and English, agreeing to share the grand natural resources of our land and our values with them in three equal parts. Mayor Chiarelli's letter to me states that I am being presented with the *Key to the City* in recognition of my immeasurable contribution to the community, my formidable accomplishments and my positive influence - I see implicit in these words a recognition of the wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples, such as my ancestors had hoped would be understood years ago, and I am grateful. The indigenous still stands in the centre between the original settlers and the newer people.



Today I wear with pride my Eagle Feather Headdress, a symbol of respect and wisdom amongst Indigenous Peoples, and this mantle, representative of my Honorary Doctorate Degree.

My people were also guided by the Seven Fires Prophecy, which had forewarned us of the difficulties we would pass through during seven epochs of time. We are now at the time of the final message of the prophecy we all, and not just the Indigenous Peoples, are experiencing Mother Earth's pain and turmoil in our physical and spiritual health. Today, we are all also impacted by the pain and stain of war. I was born on the eve of the First World War, ninety three years ago; today the energy of hatred and racism divides us even more dramatically.

It is the time of the Eighth Fire, and we need to search for more profound solutions to our deep troubles, in order to leave a legacy of hope for all our children.


My ancestors left us with two core messages - messages that have guided my work, and messages that the world needs to awaken to in these times of unprecedented global crisis: one, *Respect for Mother Earth*, and two, realization that *We are All Related*.

I want to share with you my vision to guide us through these difficult times. It is a vision for the revitalization of this Sacred Site, *Asinabka*, at the circular Chaudière Rapids, *Akikpautik: The Pipe Bowl Falls*. In this vision, the falls are restored to their original state, in celebration of the spirit of water, and Chaudière Island is replanted with trees. Together, they constitute a wild space in the heart of the country, a sanctuary to be shared with all who live in and visit this great city, and they send a symbolic message of reconciliation with Mother Earth across the globe.

This Sacred Site was a very special and powerful meeting place for indigenous peoples from time immemorial. It is time for us to light the council fires again. The vision for *Asinabka* calls for an Indigenous Centre to revitalize Indigenous culture and heritage, and a Peace Building Conference Centre for *All Our Relations*, on Victoria Island. It is here that we can come all come together as *A Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*.

I thank Mayor Chiarelli for giving me this special opportunity to present you with this vision. Its realization is dependent on all of us. I am deeply honoured that you have all come to join me in lighting the Eighth Fire on this International Peace and Prayer Day.

Megwetch! Merci!



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A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE