

National Day of Action
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Dr. William Commanda's Remarks

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The Seven Fires Prophecy told of the coming of new peoples to our land and of the sacrifices we would be called upon to bear for many generations.

In 1493, Pope Alexander VI and European kings laid the foundation for the colonization and extermination of non-European peoples, and our population fell from 72 million to 4 million in a few centuries.

But in 1532, Franciscus Di Vittoria, founder of modern international law, stated the Indians were the true owners of the land, and that the “pearls of the seas” belonged to them. This is where “Aboriginal Right” takes its roots in North America.

Four hundred years ago, Samuel de Champlain met my Algonquin ancestor Tessouat and they struck the first recorded alliance between the newcomers and the people of Turtle Island to guide travel, trade and exchange of resources.

In 1700, my ancestors created the sacred Three Figure Wampum Belt, agreeing to share our values, land and grand natural resources in three equal parts with the newcomers, then the French and English, and this commitment was reaffirmed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

Even today, the Ipperwash Inquiry concludes, “Treaties envisioned Aboriginal peoples and settlers sharing the wealth and stewardship of this great land.”

But these guiding principles were discarded, and our lands and lives transformed irrevocably. The last battle dividing our country without our consent was fought on 11 November, 1813, a hundred years before I was born.

In 1867, the Dominion of Canada was created, and government and police, guided by church, ushered in the era of oppression, of abuse, and of exploitation, and devastating eradication of our spirituality, culture, heritage, traditions and lifestyles. The painful living legacy is evident in our disproportionate levels of poverty, health problems, life expectancy, illiteracy, unemployment, addictions, suicide, alienation and deplorable living conditions.

But sadly, the people who now inhabit this land of my ancestors know very little about us. We experience the same racism, hatred and disrespect as in the past, and as a group we are marginalized and isolated. This will only change when Canadians look honestly at our history and our present day reality, and at their own history and actions and find the path to forgiveness.

Land lies at the crux of our struggles. As I have said before, if I rob a bank, is the money mine? So too with the land. People pay rent and mortgages for housing – why not, then, our due for the land and resources we have nurtured over centuries?

Further, we are related to this land; our ancestors' blood and bones are part of this soil, and we share a deep relationship with Mother Earth who provides for our physical, spiritual, emotional and mental sustenance. Others have broken their ties with their homelands and they see her merely as a commodity. The reckless exploitation of her resources has brought us to a global environmental crisis that now challenges everybody's life.

During the 1987 Constitutional Discussions, I voiced concerns about the deepening environmental crisis, and said to the ministers, we depend on you to remedy this, before the end of time; the words were scarcely heeded.

We do not yet occupy our proper place in our own land, and with the absence of our fundamental values of balance, respect and responsibility, our land has been abused almost beyond remedy. But we are vigilant with our prayers and we always have hope.

Now, Canada's psyche is beginning to understand the great gift my peoples have shared. The *Seven Wonders of Canada* reveal that Canadians are deeply affected by the natural wonders of Turtle Island.

Further, though scarcely acknowledged, our ancient values of generosity, sharing, religious tolerance, and respect for Mother Earth, women, children and diversity, also form the underlying social security safety net of this country.

People who have escaped oppression elsewhere in the world know this is true. Now, people are searching for fitness, restorative justice, holistic health care and spirituality, and are finding answers in our heritage.

It is of crucial importance that our sacred connection with the land is not further violated, that we regain our strength and serve our land and peoples as our ancestors did in the past. Without our prayer for Mother Earth, our collective future looks bleak.

I hope this day of sharing will awaken the hearts and minds of Canadians everywhere. Then we shall create a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*, and together light the Eighth Fire for a better future for all humanity.

I pray that this special place we stand on today, *Asinabka*, will birth this crucial reconciliation and healing and soon stand as the indigenous centre for healing our relations with Mother Earth and each other in the heart of this country. I invite your support for this vision.

Megwetch.

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