

## *Asinabka*

# National Aboriginal Centre

## The vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site

<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations>  
[www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca)

### William Commanda's Presentation to National Capital Commission Board of Directors, National Capital Region, Ottawa April 3, 2008

- Billions of years ago, the most ancient rocks on the earth emerged in this area
- 5,000 years ago, and likely earlier, this was a place of meeting and cultural exchange for Indigenous Peoples across North America, evidenced in copper and turquoise artifacts
- 400 years ago, Samuel de Champlain witnessed the ancestors of the Algonquin Nation conducting tobacco ceremonies here, identifying the area as a special sacred site
  
- In the 1800s, Philomen Wright moved into the area, and over the next two centuries, it became a Pandora's Box for industrial development: logging, pulp and paper, hydro dams, invention, etc.; i.e. progress and peril
- The capital city was established, bridging the worlds of Upper and Lower Canada, Quebec and Ontario, and the French and the English
- The Indigenous presence diminished, the area lost its pristine character, and today it is a heavily contaminated industrial wasteland
  
- Over time, people from all over the world gravitated towards this heartland, and their presence is felt in its cultural and heritage buildings, activities and commemorations
- Many believe Aboriginal Peoples must also take their place in what remains a sacred site within the unsundered, unceded and unconquered Algonquin territory that the capital city sits upon; and they must reignite their ceremonies and traditions respectful of *Mother Earth and All Our Relations*

- 40 years ago, Aboriginal Peoples from across the country resumed gathering and holding spiritual ceremonies in the area
- As the country becomes aware of their history and present day struggles, few will deny that Aboriginal Peoples are the least privileged and most oppressed in the lands of their ancestors, where all the world is now finding opportunity and hope
- In the past year alone, we have witnessed the national *End First Nations Poverty* campaign, and seen the *Truth and Reconciliation* Project initiated to address the devastating aftermath of the Residential School abuses
- Young Canadians of conscience are exposing painful injustices and historic legacies in documentaries like *Unrepentant* (K. Annett) and *Les Peoples Invisibles* (R. Desjardins)
- Since 1998, Elder William Commanda has consulted with the NCC, world renowned Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal, Algonquin communities in Ontario and Quebec, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples to develop a comprehensive vision for the sacred site, and support is extensive
- Who is Elder William Commanda? And why is the heritage he represents important to us?
  - He is the 94 year old Elder of this territory
  - He is Keeper of Sacred Wampum Belts of historic importance
  - He has shared the message of the 1700s Three Figure Sharing Belt with the Queen's representative
  - He is the Founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, and much honoured for promoting Indigenous wisdom, environmental stewardship, and racial harmony and peace-building internationally
  - In 2005, the University of Ottawa presented him with an Honorary Doctorate Degree
  - In 2006 he received the Key to the City of Ottawa, significant for someone from Quebec

- He is widely travelled, internationally known as a canoe builder and craftsman, an influential Elder, a statesman emeritus: a wise, holy man beloved to many across the world
  
- Over the past decade, Elder Commanda has developed and promoted the Indigenous vision for *Asinabka* tirelessly, entirely at his own expense
- It is a fully inclusive vision to revitalize and honour the true jewel in the heart of the Nation's crown, consistent with dreams of many others over the years
- It celebrates the ancient and recent history of the area, promotes peace, environmental stewardship, and Indigenous heritage
  
- The vision for *Asinabka* offers a unique, positive way to heal the pains of the past and shine a torch into the future
- It is a vision for healing relationships amongst and with Aboriginal Peoples, and with *Mother Earth*
- It is a vision for reclaiming, honouring and profiling the unique culture, heritage and values of Aboriginal Peoples, recognizing their crucial importance to Canada's future
  
- The National Capital Commission (NCC) as protector of our national heritage can play a positive leadership role to create the manifestation of a relationship of hope and reconciliation with Aboriginal Peoples
- This will benefit the entire nation, as Aboriginal Peoples remain the glue to bind a fragile democracy and culture together
- Such a gesture will also only strengthen and enhance Canada's reputation internationally
  
- In the 1970s, then NCC Chairman Jean Pigott acknowledged Victoria Island as the site for a National Aboriginal Centre
- In the 1990s, Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal developed conceptual plans for the centre for the NCC

- In 2004, further to the Elder's direct request, Canadian Heritage advanced funds to develop the proposal and architectural plans for the Aboriginal Centre on Victoria Island

- In August 2006, at the annual *Circle of All Nations* International Gathering, NCC Chairman Marcel Beaudry affirmed that:

- NCC had been working a long time, perhaps 15 years, but intensely over the last 7, for Aboriginals to be recognized once and for all in the National Capital Region

- In Ontario, English culture predominates, and in Quebec, French, but NCC felt the Aboriginals did not have a place, and noted its role to facilitate this

- NCC wanted to recognize Aboriginals by building a centre of national stature

- NCC noted the area is sacred to Aboriginals

- Aboriginals themselves should decide what should take place there: healing, spirituality, education etc

- The Federal Government would invest \$100 million dollars on the building (our note: includes remedial environmental work), and \$11 million a year on programs and services

- Two Foundations would be established to implement the project: one to oversee construction and maintenance with 50% Federal and 50% Aboriginal control; the other under Aboriginal management for programs and services

- NCC noted that Aboriginals were here much earlier than the French and English, and moving forward on this project would finally see all three founding nations represented in the capital city

- NCC also acknowledged Elder Commanda's respected status across the country amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; and Douglas Cardinal's unique architectural vision, and long term commitment to the project

- (The sentiments expressed are consistent with the Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt, with Aboriginals Peoples assuming their rightful position and share within the capital - *our note*)

- This national centre will celebrate all Aboriginal Peoples: First Nations, Inuit and Metis from across the country, and its eco-tourism value is great

- It will serve as the think tank to reclaim, revitalize and protect Indigenous languages, culture and heritage, contribute to healing the scars of the past, and transforming the future
- It will showcase and celebrate the values, artistic and cultural heritage, music, pow wow dance, spirit and food of Aboriginal Peoples
- A revitalized and strong Aboriginal Peoples will share their culture and heritage with others in the spirit of peace-building
- The ancient values of *Respect for Mother Earth and All Our Relations* will be reinstated, and serve and support all Canadians
- This legacy of forgiveness and reconciliation will strengthen the nation's self-respect and honour and heal differences

**We will celebrate together a**

*A Circle of All Nations  
A Culture of Peace*

**Canada's Gift to the World**

- On 4 June 1613, Aboriginal Peoples prayed as Samuel de Champlain passed the Sacred Site

- Today, we urge the NCC Board to

- Review its 2006 commitment to the materialization of the National Aboriginal Centre

- Make an announcement on June 21, 2008, National Aboriginal Day, to commence with implementation plans for a grand opening of the centre on the 2013 four hundred year anniversary of the birthing of the country