

National Day of Action
May 29, 2008

Dr. William Commanda's Remarks
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I welcome you to the traditional territory of my ancestors, here within the National Capital Region; as you know, this remains the shared, unceded, unsundered and unconquered land of the Algonquin Peoples. I am pleased to support the efforts of my brothers and sisters to raise awareness of the impoverished circumstances of First Peoples across the land. Last year I was deeply moved by National Chief Phil Fontein's passionate testimony on the National Day of Action, and today I am saddened to have to agree that things have not improved for us yet; indeed, our challenges are only growing.

The topic of poverty has been close to my heart for many years, both in my *Circle of All Nations* work for social justice for *all* peoples, and with respect to the First Peoples of this land.

I carry the Sacred Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt from 1700s, before my country was divided without our consent, and at that time, my ancestors agreed to share their grand natural resources and values with the newcomers, then the French and English, in three equal parts, in the spirit of welcome and sharing, joining their hands in friendship. Our ancient prophecies had told them to expect the new people, but they did not anticipate that our numbers would be so decimated, and that the new people would arrive in such large numbers. Today, First Peoples stand between the Federal and Provincial/Territorial Governments, the new partners, as the glue to hold a fragile democracy together, and between all

other interests and the land, and our rightful place is at the centre of the federal tax/resource sharing table, because, after all, it is still our resources that are being shared.

I believe some of our values form the underlying social safety net in this country – for example, generosity, social welfare and universal health care principles. *All* newcomers will acknowledge that they left oppression and worse conditions in their homelands and had no similar community welfare values to guide development, such as those that they found in the New World. But many of our other values were discarded – respect, responsibility and reverence for *Mother Earth and All Our Relations*, and now we are all facing equality, racial, cultural, environmental and health challenges of an unprecedented nature.

Our social, spiritual and cultural heritage was attacked, and today my people are the most disadvantaged in the land of our ancestors – and the fundamental principle of the Three Figure Wampum Belt – equal sharing – has been disregarded. We do not even receive an *equitable* share of our own resources – resources we developed, nurtured and protected over centuries.

There are fundamental injustices within the country's makeup that impact the First Peoples alone, and I pray that they will be resolved as we journey the road to peace and well-being for all.

I am not an economist, but it seems to me that there are some fair principles, consistent with government practices, that must be explored to ensure First Peoples receive our fair share of our grand natural resources. This will also safeguard us from violating our fundamental sacred principle – that we belong to *Mother Earth*, and we cannot sell our *Mother*; it is not right that we are obliged to accept the language and parameters of governments that do not understand our deeper preoccupations with *Mother Earth*, in negotiating a rightful place for our children.

We have within our current fiscal structures principles and mechanisms to address these wrongs:

- Distribution of resources per person as per the federal formula – for education, health, justice and social programs;

- **Equalization principles, depending on the circumstances of the communities/reserves, as with provinces;**
- **Government service transfers, as per Nunavut, for Aboriginal organizations;**
- **Floating scale for royalties for local/provincial/territorial resources;**
- **Remedial funds for historic injustices, such as the Residential School legacy, as per the Japanese or Chinese settlements.**

When you combine per person funds, funds for equalization, governance, royalties and remediation, you move to a fair range for settlement of indigenous grievances, with underlying principles that also serve to remove from the minds of Canadians at large the erroneous notion that we are welfare recipients. If Aboriginal Peoples constitute one tenth of the population, and the federal budget is gestimated roughly at 500 billion dollars, then the variation between a one third (equal) and a one tenth (equitable) share runs between 167 billion to 50 billion dollars, and the room for fair redistribution is broad and transparent.

When one realizes that the current federal Budget in Brief states that since 2006, \$21 billion in incremental tax relief—or 1.4 per cent of Canada’s economy—is being provided to Canadians and Canadian businesses this year, and our natural resources continue to sustain economies, this must surely give all Canadians and corporations of conscience cause for serious reflection.

With such principles guiding resource distribution, we will have the opportunity to recover our heritage and values on our own terms and ensure they impact the evolution and development of this country, and benefit all. We will have the opportunity to redevelop our sacred relationship with the land and its resources, and I know our prayer for the land will strengthen Mother Earth.

In my *Circle of All Nations* network, I see increasing numbers of non-Aboriginal peoples from across the globe searching for the sustaining wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples – and now many realize economic development is not the only way forward. Achieving justice for the First Peoples will ensure that we live with dignity, and Canadians with self-respect. Then, with the foundations of our relationships healed and strengthened, we will together create a vibrant and viable *Circle of All Nations and Culture of Peace*, and leave a fitting legacy for all our children.

We are living in times of prophecy, and our collective global future is volatile. It is time for the voice of Indigenous Peoples to strengthen and share again. This is the legacy, the gift of the First Peoples, to all who now occupy this land. We have been waiting forty years for a house for native people to materialize in this Sacred Site, *Asinabka*. I pray more hearts are moved to support this vision today.

Megwetch.

William Commanda