

**WILLIAM COMMANDA'S REFLECTIONS IN CORRESPONDENCE TO THE
GOVERNOR GENERAL AND THE QUEEN REGARDING HIS APPOINTMENT
TO OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF CANADA AND HIS WORK**

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May 8, 2009

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
Governor General of Canada
Rideau Hall
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Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A1
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Dear Excellency,

Re: Appointment to Officer of the Order of Canada and my Work

I am writing to express deep appreciation of my appointment to Officer of the Order of Canada, for "leadership as an elder who has promoted intercultural understanding and has raised awareness of the traditions and legacies of *Canada's* Aboriginal people."

Please permit me, an old man of ninety-five, some moments of reflection.

I was struck to note that the Order of Canada, this country's own system of honours, was instituted for the first time in 1967, during Canada's Centennial Year. I sometimes say that I see stages of change in the ways that I, the native, have been seen by others and 1967 has served as a useful date upon which to reference some of these reflections. Some have heard me recount how, while building canoes at the EXPO '67 celebrations in Montreal, my ancestral home base, I was spat upon and called *maudit sauvage*; already by that time, having commenced my own journey of forgiveness and reconciliation with the people inhabiting my country, I responded, *I love you, brother*. My next significant recollection concerning identity came in 1982, when I built a canoe for Queen Margrethe of Denmark, and in my meeting with her, felt respected for the first time in my life for what I could do with my hands and my personal gifts. At the turn of the millennium, I

joked that I often felt like *The Noble Savage* as I opened meetings for government and others. *Today*, I feel like I am taking my rightful place in this country, as one who is being acknowledged for “a lifetime of achievement and merit of a high degree, especially in service to Canada or to humanity at large.” The Order of Canada Motto says, DESIDERANTES MELIOREM PATRIAM; I too desire a better country, indeed a better world.

I am deeply grateful to witness this national recognition in my lifetime. For so long, I have felt *invisible*.

I carry the dreams of my ancestors, my peoples and my descendents with me, so I do not come to this honour alone.

Others have nominated me for this wonderful honour. May I present myself to you?

I was named *Ojigkwanong: Morning Star* by my mother, because my peoples believe that the world of nature impacts our lives and responsibilities, and that that connection must be honoured; as brightly as the star shone in the surrounding darkness on the morning of my birth, so was I to strive to shine a torch during my lifetime. My clan is Squirrel, and with that gentle wild creature comes responsibilities to gather and plant seeds widely, and thus foster and celebrate biodiversity; and to travel the ups and downs of the journey of life, head first, with courage and determination. My family’s name is *Segimay: Mosquito*; you may have heard the Mahatma Gandhi quip about the mosquito, reminding us never to forget the power of one: that was the philosophy behind the development of individuals and not institutions in our culture. My grandfather Louis *Segimay* Commanda’s family acquired their new name because, with their English allies, they played a key role in the protection of their northern lands along their canoe and portage route from the colonizers in the south during the war of 1812 - the area that has become the Rideau Canal UNESCO World Heritage Site; we are *invisible* in this story that lead to the birth of Canada, the last battle of that war having been fought on 11 November, 1813, exactly one hundred years before I was born. My great, great grandfather, who is still remembered by his native name, Luc Antoine Pakinawatik: *Stick Hit by Lightning*, his name reminding us of his regenerative connection with the Laws of Nature that govern life, was carrier of four sacred Wampum Belts for the Indigenous Peoples; he established the reserve of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg in 1854, before there was a Canada or a Quebec, prepared to share his vast territory on the Ottawa River Watershed and into the Saint Lawrence and the Great Lakes with the newcomers, while holding a portion intact as a sanctuary to protect our language, culture, heritage and resources.

My ancestors played leadership roles within our community and beyond, and many served as *chiefs*, as I did myself, acclaimed to this position for over nineteen years. An activist fighting for Indigenous Rights since the forties when we commenced our appeals for recognition and for environmental stewardship to the United Nations, I was appointed Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government in 1953, and I continue to hold its values strong in my heart and promote them in my work and actions. I have been Carrier of three Sacred Wampum Belts since 1971, and their messages are as relevant today as they were centuries ago. Today, many people are beginning to realize

this. The *Seven Fires Prophecy* anticipated these times of unprecedented change in our lives across the globe, and since its warnings were not heeded, many new choices are being forced upon the world at large with great urgency now regarding our relationship with Mother Earth and each other. With the *Three Figure Welcoming/ Sharing Wampum Belt* of the 1700s, created before our country was divided, my ancestors of the Eastern Seaboard agreed to share the grand natural resources of our land and our values in three equal parts with the newcomers, then the French and English – today, we Indigenous Peoples remain the most impoverished, oppressed and *invisible* in our own land; at the same time, with the absence of a true integration of our values in the evolution of this country which believes it lights a torch for the world, today we face global environmental, economic and human crises of an unprecedented nature. The Jay Treaty *Border Crossing Belt* on one level acknowledged that we were the true and original inhabitants of the continent of North America, and our right to travel without molestation affirmed – yet today we are confined to poor reserves, and provincial and national boundaries divide and undermine us. In this youngest of our belts, the genuine purple wampum beads are separated by artificial white Hudson Bay beads – our ancestors knew the borders in their lands would be breaking down; and over the past decade, I have reminded many people of the headline – *it is 2025, and Canada becomes the 51st state of the US*. Today, you see this is already starting to happen.

Following a deep spiritual awakening in 1961, I embarked on the work of creating a *Circle of All Nations* and over the past decade I have reached out nationally, across America and internationally to share Indigenous wisdom and prayer, promote respect for Mother Earth and environmental stewardship, support individual and community healing and advance racial harmony and peace building. I do this alone, with no organization, infrastructure or funding, but over the years, many thousands of people have integrated these values as a way of life. This is a mere drop in the ocean. Still, it has come to the attention of the larger world, and I have been honoured with awards and acknowledgement for my efforts to advance Indigenous values. Two honours within the National Capital Region are especially important to me: my *Honorary Doctorate Degree* from the University of Ottawa – a significant acknowledgement of the relevance of Indigenous wisdom held by a *Kindergarten Dropout*; and the *Key to the City* of Ottawa, a conscious or unconscious recognition that the rightful place of my people lies within the heart of the country, *where the people of a city can see friends they can trust even with their lives, the only ones who can really open the heart of the city* – such, I am told, are the Roman origins to this honour.

With this appointment to Officer of the Order of Canada, I see the Office of the Queen acknowledging *Indigenous*, and I feel we are coming closer to joining hands in the sacred circle of humanity; I feel we are no longer quite so invisible in our lands.

Still, I must take a moment to reflect briefly on our history and current reality as Indigenous Peoples.

Land lies at the crux of our struggles: we believe we belong to the land; newcomers think they can own Mother Earth. In 1532, Franciscus di Vittoria, acclaimed as Founder of

Modern International Law, asserted to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire that *the Indians were the true owners of the land, holding it in honour of the Creator, and that the pearls of the sea belonged to them*. This is where the notion of Aboriginal Rights has its roots in North America. This is the zone of the *Honour of the Crown*. Treaties were not negotiated in good faith over much of the country, and *here*, the traditional territory of my ancestors remains unceded, unsundered and unconquered land. Some, like me, have deep reservations about laws, and regulations and amendments, often seeing these as tools that have given others unjustified rights over our lands and resources. When my ancestors first met Philomen Wright, the first white settler, at the Sacred Chaudière Site on the Ottawa River in 1800, and asked by what right he cut down the trees and took the land, the stranger drew a paper from his pocket and read “*The Indians have consented to relinquish all claim to the land, in compensation for which they receive annual grants from the Government, which shall be withheld if they molest settlers.*” This paper, my ancestors saw as a big “*loup garou*”, an indescribable monster supposed to have supernatural powers, and in my own lifetime, I have experienced the deep fear this reference brings to native peoples. Such are the roots for the struggle for land. Divorce from the land, the destructive attack on our identity, our political, judicial, family, social and cultural structures, the outlawing and undermining of our profound and integrated spiritual ceremonies and ideology, and our invisibility in our homeland are the manifestation of the deepest *solitude* within this country, and this cancer impacts the land and all the inhabitants. This is evident tangibly in the Residential Schools legacy; overt and systemic racism; the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal Peoples in the criminal justice system; the confusion between crime and the struggle for rights and the injustices therein; the Missing Women’s tragedy; the plight of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women; the failure of the educational system; our abject poverty; struggles with all forms of abuse and suicide; and the exploitation and destruction of our grand natural resources. Our spirit is being crushed.

The world has awakened to the tremendous burden Indigenous Peoples have carried in the evolution of this modern world, and, after decades of struggle, have finally signed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. However, this country, where the world comes to roost, still fails us, the original, legitimate inhabitants of this land. The fragility of the authority over the land was evident to the world at large when you in your capacity as representative of the Crown were obliged to prorogue parliament this very winter.

Homogenized worlds are not the ones that can generate creativity and sustain life – and in the world of nature it is the glorious biodiversity that sparks life anew again and again. Many have heard me quote the “Only After” Indigenous prophecy repeatedly over the years:

- Only after the last tree is cut,
- Only after the last river is poisoned,
- Only after the last fish has been caught,
- **Only then** you will know that

Your money cannot be eaten!

Few will deny now that the then is now. We are living in times of prophecy!

We *cannot* be assimilated and it would be dangerous and irrevocable global loss if Indigenous Peoples all merely became Honorary Canadian Citizens, because the world itself is in need of the dynamic energy of the Indigenous to regenerate itself.

Forgive me for dwelling on these matters. But because I believe this subject is essential to a true understanding of the reason why the Indigenous worldview is important to all of us, ***I am including as Appendix 1, an excerpt from my ninety fifth birthday blog on the Seven Wonders of Canada, and the unacknowledged Indigenous spirit underlying this reverence for my country.*** Those consumed with an unquenchable desire for the resources that do not sustain life when commodified and expropriated place all existence in danger, and despite the grave warnings of Mother Earth continue on a path of destruction; in the move from money laundering to the new “mining laundering”, Earth is not being fooled at all.

This backdrop leads now to my current pressing priority and preoccupation. It concerns our vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site and the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island, within the National Capital Region, (as outlined in the attached bilingual note, Appendix 2.)

For four decades, Indigenous Peoples have been striving actively to establish an Indigenous Centre at the ancient sacred site at the Chaudières Falls, within the heart of the country and the National Capital Region. This place was visited by peoples from across the continent for six thousand years; it is no wonder that Queen Victoria chose this area for what has become Parliament of Canada. It is today a desecrated industrial wasteland, *but* it is still precious to us.

I believe the vision for an Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island and the larger complementary vision for *Asinabka*, the Sacred Chaudière Site, is not only important for Indigenous peoples but also for the world. It is one bastion in an ever-darkening horizon of chaos.

Its core elements include the Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, a Peace Building complex, an Eco City Park and Think Tank on the Environment, and a Historic Park. It is the Indigenous vision for hope, reconciliation, integration and inclusion, with national and international relevance, in what used to be the grand, sacred meeting place of Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island since *Time Immemorial*, but what has instead become a shameful urban brownfield in the heart of this country in less than two hundred years.

Over the past four decades, Aboriginal Peoples have resumed congregating in this area. In the seventies, this place was identified as the site of an Aboriginal centre in the plans of the National Capital Commission. For over a decade, *I* have worked hard to advance this plan. Today, you will still not find a toilet on this site, unlike all the other public places managed by the NCC.

Ten years ago, in May 2000, their Excellencies then, Adrienne Clarkson and John Raulston Saul, participated in a talking circle at my *Circle of All Nations Millennium Peace Building Gathering*, and then and in subsequent meetings, I presented them with

our vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island. As advised, we thereafter approached several Prime Ministers, and a range of federal ministries for support of this project. Forty years after this cultural centre was envisioned in the plans of the National Capital Commission (NCC), and notwithstanding the years of effort of the past decade, government in Canada is still unable to identify a clear responsibility centre, and take any action whatsoever on this file. Though in 2004, further to my direct request to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the NCC (which is mandated to showcase the culture of Canada in the heartland) commissioned the preparation of a Recommendation to Cabinet on the project, and in 2006, (when its own mandate was under review) it expressed full support for the project, it really *has not* assumed its fundamental responsibility to ensure First Peoples are visible in the picture of the Canadian face; one can only speculate on the depths of the negative racial burden we have had to carry in this failure to showcase the true history and heritage of Indigenous Peoples in this evolving country. In April, 2008, we made a presentation to the new board of the NCC and I include the notes as **Appendix 3** in order to give you a brief overview of the file.

This absence and avoidance of responsibility to acknowledge and honour the original peoples of this land by government is not merely painful, and devastatingly costly to the well being of Indigenous Peoples who remain *invisible* to the people who now occupy our own homeland, but such attitudes have also meant that our lands and waters have been exploited without the balancing wisdom of Indigenous Peoples, and our deep wisdom and fundamental understandings about peace, inter-cultural, personal and social relationships has been largely untapped. It is no wonder that the world is now facing unprecedented environmental and social crises, and few will deny that *no* critically significant shift in this reality is being felt anywhere yet.

I have limited resources to pursue this effort further by myself, and as you must be aware, First Peoples are so preoccupied with barely coping with so many urgent matters, there are limited opportunities and resources for many of us to focus on the truly important ones in a concerted manner. At this precise moment, my people are having to petition in Parliament to stop cuts to education funding, and at the same time, researchers are finding that *Aboriginal Peoples are astoundingly poorer than other Ethnic minorities* (Saskatoon Star Phoenix, March 2009). I lived through the great depression when my parents were forcibly prevented from hunting and fishing, while on our lands, (where there were no treaties even) our resources were being stolen, appropriated and destroyed; at this time people in towns and cities received welfare, and we Indigenous Peoples nothing at all. Today, Canada again looks to our natural resources while we remain invisible and marginalized and increasingly impoverished. We are not blind to these realities, and our history does not reflect well on the early settlers; neither does our reality reflect well on the newer occupants of our land, many themselves having experienced similar exploitation and oppression in other homelands.

Against this desperate backdrop of the present day lives of my peoples, nonetheless, our spirit remains undefeated. And today there are countless peoples, both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal, who have expressed deep hope to see the materialization of the vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site for the potential benefit and self respect of all. **I have been requesting one *tiny* portion of our rightful share of our grand natural resources to**

entrench our spirit, heritage and prayer on our ancient sacred site in a vision for reconciliation, integration and sustainable relationships for all, locally, nationally and internationally, and *during my lifetime.*

Ten years after my original request to the former Governor General of Canada for support for the Vision to establish a Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island, and following years of efforts with the federal government, and three Prime Ministers and other Cabinet Ministers, I come back to report to your office that I am deeply disappointed that we have made no advance in this effort after all. I am told that we need a champion for this work. Perhaps. I think we need justice. I pray to see a significant statement about the manifestation of this vision before the anniversary of the famous June 11 apology that has shifted so very little in our reality.

Now I understand that your office must kept safe from political issues which are not considered a part of your constitutional responsibilities but should rather be directed to your Canadian Ministers. I provide you with this update on my work because its essence lies at the core of honour you are now bestowing upon me, and I do believe that you and Order of Canada colleagues will understand the nature of my preoccupations.

I hope to see you on the fifteenth of May. Sadly, today, I sign this letter from the Queensway Carleton Hospital; you will understand how the urgency of my mission presses upon me.

I must now bring this unfinished business to the attention of her Royal Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, who, I know, continues to seek to safeguard the *Honour of the Crown* in her remarkable, exemplary way. (Copy of correspondence included)

Your Excellency, may I leave you with my take on the lines of our times, these times of unprecedented change: Black is beautiful, Brown is kinda cute, and, *Its time for the Red Man to Get Ahead, Man!*

Thank you once again for the deep honour with which I am being invested. Every good wish to you in your service to this land, its peoples and beyond.

Sincerely,

William Commanda, Hon. Phd., O.C
Algonquin Elder
Founder, Circle of All Nations

circleofallnations@sympatico.ca

www.circleofallnations.ca (General Information)

www.asinabka.com (Indigenous Centre Information)

<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations> (Elder Commanda's Recent Activities)

4 files included

Appendix 1

I wish to illustrate a little further thoughts we shared at my ninety fifth birthday celebration, and this pertains to the recent CBC exploration of the Seven Wonders of Canada, and the Indigenous spirit underlying this reverence for this country.

Excerpt from the Ninety Five Year Old's Birthday Blog:

Hundreds of folks joined us for this special theme birthday celebration. The theme? *Entrenching Indigenous Spirit in the National Capital Region*, through two lenses – one, the *Seven Wonders of Canada and the Indigenous Spirit* underlying them, as reflected in the work and passions of William Commanda, and two, the *Indigenous Prophecy Only After ... :*

Only after the last tree is cut,

Only after the last river is poisoned,

Only the last fish has been caught,

Only then you will know that your money cannot be eaten!

Yes, it was a “political” party, to draw attention to the very serious work that Elder Dr. William Commanda has been engaged in all his life, that constitutes a significant portion of the legacy he leaves the world. Yes, though he does not hold a formal job, has no staff or organization, is not funded, has no communications or marketing team, and is largely invisible, he has nonetheless managed to move many serious thinkers – and now we want his ideas to reach further – many now believe our collective future is dependent on this.

So, with respect to the *Seven Wonders of Canada*, you will recall that last year, CBC hosted the contest where Canadians voted for their favourite wonders and a panel of judges finalized the choices.

Well, I realized that though they are so invisible in this country, it was actually the spirit of Indigenous Peoples that breathed behind each of the wonders, and was reflected concretely in the work of William Commanda, who, like the composite Indian on the 1933 US silver buffalo nickel, holds the energy and heritage of his ancestors across the continent of North America, but even more, reflects and includes all of us - as Valerie Pouyanne from France expressed it in his birthday book of 2003, *everybody's family merges as one in William*. Well, I thought, once everyone realizes this, they will not want Indigenous Peoples to be invisible; they will want them to occupy their rightful place! Surely that must be the penultimate wonder of Canada!

So we developed poster boards to illustrate our thoughts about the Seven Wonders. We share some of our key points here.

1. First of course was *Canoe*.

- Canoe spirit is deeply ingrained in the spirit of the land and in William himself – and in his nomadic ancestors who created the birchbark canoe. One reference in William's files reflects on the creation mythology of his peoples and on the Spirit

of Manitou – Where was Manitou, before he created the Earth? *In his canoe, which was floating in the skies*”.

- As you may know, William Commanda is a canoe builder of international reknown, and when he was ninety, he taught Todd Labrador some of his canoe building skills, captured in a documentary by Valerie Pouyanne, entitled, after William’s favourite line, *Good Enough for Two!*
- The Canadian Museum of Civilization put one of William’s own canoes up on display for the celebration, and it ushered folk into the room. Amongst our guests was the new director of the Canadian Canoe Museum, James Raffan – who had been prepared to bring one of William’s canoes from that site in Peterborough to grace our celebrations!
- The Indigenous Canoe is the foremost symbolic wonder of Canada, integrating the physical and metaphysical, and integrating spirit, art, craft and ingenuity with the practical and sustainable.
- It is the metaphor for navigating the journey of one’s life!
- We know that the Honourable Jack Layton liked this image – he used it in his CTV interview on Question Period this past week! – and it seems that he understands this type of Indigenous metaphor in a deep way: at the 2007 First Nations Action Day for Poverty, it was he who first noticed the Eagles flying over Indian Affairs Building as he made his speech!

2. Next, we reflected on the *Spirit of the North, and the Wisdom of the Older Sibling.*

- A very special spirit joined us for this display – the skin of the actual Polar Bear shot during the days of native guides taking tourists out to shoot animals as trophies – William’s bear died in 1956, the time period when polar bears were being severely over-hunted; this led to the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of the Polar Bear and Their Habitat, yet today, increasingly threatened, we still look for leadership to address the main threats to the fragile Arctic marine ecosystems – climate change, hunting and industrial development.
- Two other “Trophy” animal spirits have also come to William for protection: Anaconda for the Amazon and Springbok from Africa. They oblige us to reexamine our values and understand the prayer for “*All my relations*”. We have a shameful history to make amends for across the world.
- *All animals are equal, and some are **not** more equal than others* – if animals are growing weaker, as a direct consequence of our actions on the Mother Earth, can we expect to stay immune to any repercussions ourselves? The Law of Karma indicates otherwise.

- We also reflected on another message from the North – *snow shoes*.
- Yes, in the old days, William himself ran 50 miles a day after his dog sled in his snow shoes. In the old days, all native communities did. And they were all healthy and fit – community survival was dependent on, you got it! - *Universal Health Care*.
- Today, we have the Olympics and spectator sports and elitist sports, and the population at large worries about obesity and diabetes and health care.
- And, intriguingly enough, William Commanda is the recipient of the 1998 Wolf Project Award, the *Corona Borealis*. (President Nelson Mandela is the recipient of the Southern Crown Wolf).

3. Next, History: Quebec City and before – *Ancient History*

- Billions of years ago, the most ancient rocks on Earth emerged *here*, the territory of William’s ancestors, and the womb of the Ottawa River Watershed – intriguingly enough in a period called, yes, the Algonquian Period (emerged here and in Brazil, but the Himalayas, Alps, Rockies etc came later.) And remember, though not on the official Seven Wonders list, the largest number of votes was registered for the *Sleeping Giant Rock* in Thunder Bay!
- 5,000 years ago, the Sacred Chaudière Site served as a significant meeting place for the Indigenous peoples of North and South America, evidenced in the turquoise, and copper and the world’s earliest mining artifacts found in the vicinity.
- 400 years ago, William’s ancestors prayed here for the new world as Champlain watched.
- In the 1500s, there were more than 100,000,000 peoples in America – 90 per cent were decimated by the original germ warfare, and Cortez fought the remaining 10 percent to near genocide.
- In the 1600s the land transformation began: *with the fur trade, logging, dams, hydro, nuclear energy – i.e. the resources of William’s peoples of the Ottawa River Watershed gave birth to Canada and they are now dangerously polluted and depleted*. Canada still depends on William’s grand natural resources for its survival – the resources represented in the sacred 1700s Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt. And don’t forget either that originally, the labour of Aboriginal Peoples was essential to the accessing of the natural resources.
- Today, November 16, is Louis Riel Day and it is a sharp reminder that Canadians at large know very little about the full history of Canada. It is of crucial importance that this history be understood by the original settlers, the newer

immigrants and by our youth, or we will never be able to avail ourselves of the strengths and wisdom of the original peoples of this land, and we shall all be poorer for this, literally, figuratively and spiritually.

4. Then, Parks and the *Boreal Forest*

- Elder Commanda is the tireless voice for Mother Earth.
- In 1987, at the First Ministers' Conference with Aboriginal Peoples, which was focused on Aboriginal Rights, he, focused on **Aboriginal Responsibility**, raised the urgent warning cry for the environment, citing pollution that needed to be addressed *before the end of time*.
- He conducted pipe ceremonies for the pre-Earth Summit preparations hosted by President Mitterand in France, where Indigenous Peoples insisted on the idea of a relationship with a living Gaia, rather than merely a resource to be managed more judiciously.
- He took the message of the Seven Fires Prophecy to the first United Nations conference of Indigenous Peoples in 1993, which the people called the *Cry of the Earth* conference.
- He led the Sun Bow Five Walk for Mother Earth in 1995/96 – a seven and a half month walk across America, from First Encounter Beach in Massachusetts to Santa Barbara in California taking prayer and ceremony to Turtle Island, to nurture environmental stewardship and personal and communal growth.
- In 1996, during the release of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, he drew the analogy between their struggles and the plight of the polluted Ottawa River.
- Did you know that seventy per cent of our national parks were created at the insistence of Aboriginal Peoples?
- Elder Commanda served as Honorary Elder for the Boreal Forest Rendezvous organized by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association and the David Suzuki Foundation in 2004.
- The beautiful photo journal of this marvelous educational experience, edited by James Raffan, is embedded within the prayers of our Elder.
- William Commanda is the recipient of the Bill Mason Conservation Award and is Honorary Chair of the Ottawa Heritage River Designation Committee.

At this juncture, we made the statement that **We are living in times of prophecy!**

Many of you will have heard William recount the “Only After” Indigenous prophecy repeatedly over the years:

- Only after the last tree is cut,
- Only after the last river is poisoned,
- Only the last fish has been caught,
- **Only then** you will know that
 - Your money cannot be eaten!

The then is now!

- Logging is in decline.
- Well, as they say, *the has*, quite literally, *hit the fan* in the Ottawa River
 - (is it not ironic that the sewers overflowed at the residence of the Prime Minister and the Embassy of France?)
- The ancient *American Eel*, which was once so plentiful in the Ottawa River Watershed, has been placed on the Endangered Species List in Ontario.
- And now we are all caught in the worse global financial crisis ever.

It is of crucial and urgent importance that we reassess our priorities collectively.

5. Next, **Water Falls** and the Spirit of Water

- One of the four *sacred* elements, essential for all life.
- Contaminated, polluted and depleted everywhere.
- William’s community has been drinking bottled water for over ten years already.
- William Commanda says, “I believe Mother Earth is a living creature. She has a body and spirit and veins. The rivers are her veins. If they are blocked everywhere, cancers, poisons, build up; eventually they kill. Dams, motorized vehicles, foreign animals, fertilizers, pesticides, raw sewage attack the life blood of Mother Earth. She has to fight back. It is **Nature’s Law.**”
- Japanese scientist Dr. Masuru Emoto’s work on water affirms the Indigenous understanding that water is spirit, and is impacted by prayer.
- The Sacred Chaudière Site, the ancient meeting place of the Pipe Bowl Rapids, calls for a symbolic reconciliation with Water Spirit by undamming the *damned and damning* dam. (See later – No.7 *)

6. Then, Pier 21 and the celebration of Multiculturalism – and William Commanda’s *Circle of All Nations – Culture of Peace*

The *Circle of All Nations* - A global eco community unified by values of

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Forgiveness
- Compassion

Focused on advancing

- Indigenous Wisdom
- Respect for Mother Earth
- Racial Harmony
- Social Justice

- William Commanda is a recipient of the Wolf and Harmony Awards for his efforts to celebrate diversity, promote inter-cultural understanding and racial harmony, and advance peace-building – all without programs, but rather through individual and communal development and transformation.
- This effort becomes most animated during his annual August *Circle of All Nations* Gatherings at his home in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg.
- We could see the fruits of his efforts in the diverse crowd who gathered together for the special birthday celebration – people from all walks and stations of life, from all cultures and backgrounds, from all ages – grandchildren Claudette and Chuck, old friends like the Patron of the Canadian Canoe Museum, Kirk Wipper, now eighty five, retired RCMP Commanding Officer Hoovey, and other police friends like Bryan Bowers from the Kingston Police, and new ones from the OPP, Tony and Danielle Belcourt from the Metis community, Donna who defends wolves and loons, Ms Marie Lemay from the NCC, politicians like the Honourable Jack Layton, (I was able to introduce them, so at the political level and the NCC level, each knows there is genuine interest in Elder Commanda’s vision for the Indigenous Centre), M.P Paul Dewar, M.P.P. Yasim Naqvi, Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon representing Dr. Rabinovitch from the Canadian Museum of Civilization and, Aboriginal Architect, Douglas Cardinal (who described the conceptual plans for the Indigenous Centre), film maker John Thompson, James Raffan and Jeremy Iron from the Canadian Canoe Museum, Judith Matheson, Pamela, Joanna, Fran Denis with the Metis contingent from Maniwaki, and Guillaume Carle and his Indigenous UN colleagues from South America (FANCV), Innu twins and elders, Leo and Omar St. Onge, long time supporters like Ray Sunstrum, Minnie Matoush, the Aboriginal Women Drummers, Elaine Shipley and her son Theland, Roy and Susan Barnes, Derek James, Paul Boivert, Eva, Luc Fournier, Jeremy Wright, Mike Greco, Tito and Sandra Medino and daughters, Elena and Veronica, Donald Parent, Bill Sluiman from the Indigenous Cooperative on the Environment, Larry McDermott from Plenty Canada, Phil Wier, and Stephen Augustine, and of course, amongst the hundreds of others,

equally special, but impossible to mention, our very special guests, Donald Marshall Junior, Colleen Dorsay and their one year old son! And there was a message of congratulations from the Mayor Larry O'Brien and the councilors from the City of Ottawa. (Later, William received a letter of congratulations from the Honourable Chuch Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs, who not only commended him on his years of hard work but also noted specifically his work for the Chaudière and Victoria Island!)

- Indeed, we did show case the multicultural face of Canada, quite brilliant in its diversity, sparkle, skills, creativity, and passionate in its love and appreciation of the Indigenous spirit who had drawn all together with single minded and single handed determination, love and acceptance over the years.
- An unforgettable, moving experience – the Canada we all want!

7. Finally, we showcased the vision for *Asinabka – the Sacred Chaudière Site* to commemorate the Indigenous Spirit behind the Seven Wonders of Canada, comprising:

*The Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island – William's rightful place. How can Canada hold together without the "Centre"? We see today how the world is falling apart at the seams. Let us not lose the voice and wisdom of all the Indigenous Peoples.

*Peace Building – William continues to express a unique version of the hand of friendship and reconciliation that his ancestors first offered. Are we ready to awaken to its power? Our other choices are breaking hearts everywhere.

*An Eco City Park – A think tank to advance environmental stewardship and respect for Mother Earth and the Sacred Waterfall.

*A Historic Park to show case Canada's ancient and modern history, and to reflect and celebrate a *Circle of All Nations*.

- Did you know that the Maple Leaf appeared on the North American Indian Nations Flag in 1945, decades before the Canadian flag? And that Indian Day, National Aboriginal Day, celebrated on June 21, was actually first declared then, in 1945, by Jules Sioui, founding Secretary of the group, then affirmed more recently by Governor General Romeo Leblanc? And that Beaver, our national animal, is an integral part of the creation story of William's Algonquin ancestors?
- Surely it is time for Indigenous Peoples, the First Peoples, to take their rightful, **visible** place within the heart of this country? Surely this is the path to self-respect for all of us, this path to **Reconciliation**?
- The United Nations promotes the theme of **Reconciliation** next year.

- Canada can take a new place of leadership and pride on the global stage by accepting the Indigenous gesture of Reconciliation as reflected in the work, passion and outreach of Elder, Doctor, Grandfather William Commanda, and endorsing the far reaching Indigenous vision for *Asinabka – the Sacred Chaudière Site!*
- It is the only step that can ensure that the global human spirit grows beyond the reaches it has attained in recent months in the southern part of Turtle Island, and Canada is certainly best poised to make this leap at this time.
- It is all part of another Indigenous prophecy after all – the one of security, when all the peoples of the world find their place under the protective branches of the Sacred Tree of Turtle Island. The ancient sacred site within the heart of this country, under the care of the Indigenous spirit, has its role to play in generating this future and in that Zen way, that *100 hundred monkeys tipping the energy way*, all the world will all benefit from it, because we will be on the path of that transformation that William is always talking about.

And, I am not wrong about this – on New Years’ Day, the media pundits on CFRA – where William keeps track of a certain pulse of the nation – noted that **the high water mark in Prime Minister Harper’s year was the June 11 Apology to Aboriginal Peoples!**

Appendix 2

The bilingual brochure on the vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site

(see www.asinabka.org)

Appendix 3

Asinabka

National Aboriginal Centre

The vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site

<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations>

www.circleofallnations.ca

www.asinabka.com

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 BY THE NCC 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

Circle of All Nations
Home: 231 Pitobig Mikan
Maniwaki, Quebec, J9E 3B1
Mail: c/o 506 Stratas Court
Kanata, Ontario
K2L 3K7

May 8, 2009

Her Majesty The Queen
Buckingham Palace
London SW1A 1AA

An Urgent Message from 95 year old Algonquin Elder William Commanda to Her Royal Majesty, Queen Elizabeth 11

Dear Majesty,

May I present my greetings?

In 1953, upon your coronation, I received a royal certificate and medal, intimating an invisible yet tangible direct connection to you; I was forty years old at the time, and I was serving my community as chief appointed by acclamation.

Now, I am being honoured in Canada by appointment as Officer of the *Order of Canada*. With this recognition bestowed upon me by your official representative in my homeland, the Governor General of Canada, I am drawn again to the periphery of your circle, and now I come to you, fifty six years later, with a special mission.

I am now almost ninety six years old. It has not been easy to witness the great struggles of my grandparents and parents and the continued pain and oppression of my people throughout the continent of North America, over this century of unprecedented global change. Believing, as we Indigenous Peoples do, that we belong to Mother Earth, the repercussions of the wanton abuse of our lands, waters and natural resources have overflowed into our already traumatized lives. Like Mother Earth, we too are experiencing extreme stress.

In 1982, Canada repatriated the constitution and specific provisions regarding Indigenous Peoples were incorporated within its charter of responsibilities. These remain unfulfilled. Today, Canada stands alone as one of the few nations that has refused to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

A few are beginning to realize that the salvation of Mother Earth is inextricably linked with the survival of Indigenous Peoples, and that our prayer and ancient wisdom is essential to global healing – a few, but not yet many.

The fundamental prayer of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, *Ginawaydaganuc*, contains in its essence the profound understanding that we are all inter-related –as members of the great human family, and with all that the chief elements, Fire, Earth, Water and Air provide to sustain us; biodiversity in all its forms is the fundamental principle of life.

Over the years, I have pondered the power of England over the Globe, and while I daily mourn the demise of my language, I note that today, the English language is used across the world – there must be some reason for this, beyond what has been undertaken in its name by its use and manipulation to date. Today, the world is drawn together by unprecedented environmental crisis, war and the collapse of financial and social regimes that governed life over the past five hundred years. New ideas are needed now, to be communicated to and understood by all, because we now realize we are a global community.

But maybe we need to return to old values. Recently, I was heartened by your words acclaiming the meeting of civilizations when your first ancestors met mine in this New World. This world and beyond is now fast becoming the *Paradise Lost*. I believe Indigenous Peoples, though so invisible on the world stage, have something of crucial importance to offer to the world, and it is of urgent importance for this message to be really heard and understood now. I believe that your voice is needed now to facilitate this.

Over the past decade, I have worked constantly to develop and advance an integrated vision for the healing of Indigenous Peoples, relationships with others, and our collective relationship with Mother Earth, at the Ancient Sacred Site at the Chaudières Falls in the capital city of Canada, across from the place that your own ancestor, Queen Victoria, chose for the Parliament Buildings. It is no accident that Winston Churchill, carrying that drop of Indigenous blood (Anne Pennington Mayer, who served you on during a visit to Canada, tells me that his *daughter* (corr July 4, 2009) Mary Churchill noted recently that she was one ‘*thirty two-th*’ Red Indian) delivered his *December 30, 1941* (corr. July 4, 2009) speech to the world from this place. For six thousand years, this place was the meeting place of the ancient peoples. But over the past few hundreds Indigenous Peoples have been moved away from it, and it has become a contaminated and desecrated wasteland. I am told that it is not clear who *owns* various portions of this tiny space of modified islands and water. I do not believe we have any right to buy or sell Mother Earth; this area remains unceded, unsundered and unconquered Algonquin Territory, and the place remains precious to us.

You will understand this, as perhaps the original Lords of Trade might have. I am told that in recent times the United States wanted to buy the land its Embassy sits upon in England and it was reminded of the sway of the law of the multi year lease and of the accompanying bankruptcy provisions. In 1532, Franciscus di Vittoria, acclaimed as Founder of Modern International Law, asserted to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire that *the Indians were the true owners of the land, holding it in honour of the Creator, and that the pearls of the sea belonged to them*. This is where the notion of Aboriginal Rights has its roots in North America. This is the zone of the *Honour of the*

Crown. Treaties were not negotiated in good faith over much of this country, and *here*, the traditional territory of my ancestors remains unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered land. Some, like me, have deep reservations about laws, and regulations and amendments, often seeing these as tools that have given others unjustified rights over our lands and resources. When my ancestors first met Philomen Wright, the first white settler, at the Sacred Chaudière Site on the Ottawa River in 1800, and asked by what right he cut down the trees and took the land, the stranger drew a paper from his pocket and read “*The Indians have consented to relinquish all claim to the land, in compensation for which they receive annual grants from the Government, which shall be withheld if they molest settlers.*” This paper, my ancestors saw as a big “*loup garou*”, an indescribable monster supposed to have supernatural powers, and in my own lifetime, I have experienced the deep fear this reference brings to native peoples. Such are the roots in the struggle for land.

I am told that at the present time, Domtar Inc. holds the lease in perpetuity to the Sacred Chaudière Island for \$100 a year – others have claimed this stranglehold control over the sacred site over the past century – a site that was the “commons” to us. Domtar is a paper company that became rich by clear cutting the timber in my traditional territory, but it is now obliged by the *Laws of Nature* to disengage from this activity; it now wishes to exploit and commodify another sacred natural resource, Water, provided by the Great Mystery for the use of all.

I believe a symbolic gesture to signify transformation of this relationship with Mother Earth is of crucial importance.

Over the past four decades, Indigenous Peoples have begun returning to the Sacred Site. And we have developed a vision which restores our relationship with the sacred area, and constitutes a symbolic statement of reconciliation with Mother Earth. It is also a vision for the healing of Indigenous Peoples; in this age of information sharing, and awareness of our collective histories and our present day reality of oppression, who could deny we deserve no less? Moreover, others need to be forgiven by us in order to break the energy of the cycle of abuse and shame, and we know that. We have had to carry a great burden for the world and our sacred prophecies tell us that it is now time for transformation. Thus our vision is for a place of reconciliation and reconnection with all others.

The core elements of our vision include an Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, a Peace Building complex, an Eco City Park and Think Tank on the Environment, and a Historic Park. It is the Indigenous vision for hope, reconciliation, integration and inclusion, with potentially huge national and international relevance.

Ten years ago I shared this vision with the former Governor General of Canada, thereafter with a range of Canadian Ministers, and now I have returned to report on my efforts to Her Excellency, the new Governor General. I am attaching a copy of my correspondence to her for further clarification and elaboration on this effort.

Yes, I have a vision for the Sacred Chaudières Site, a vision to commence the healing of half a millennia of oppression and injustice inflicted on the people of the Americas – a vision to shine a beacon of hope and visibility for my people, to consecrate the relationship with Mother Earth, and ignite peace and reconciliation with all others. This is the dream my ancestors dreamed, and one that I have carried as keeper of the ancient Sacred Record Keeping Wampum Belts. It has not been a light responsibility. It is time to share it.

Today, I am almost ninety six, and suddenly, I find myself in a hospital bed. I know it is time to deliver this mission and vision to you, the one who carries the *Honour of the Crown* on your shoulders.

Please accept my appreciation of your tremendous courage and global leadership in a century of such change, and my best wishes for your continued good health.

Sincerely,

William Commanda, Hon. Phd., O.C
Algonquin Elder
Founder, Circle of All Nations

circleofallnations@sympatico.ca

www.circleofallnations.ca (General Information)

www.asinabka.com (Indigenous Centre Information)

<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations> (Elder Commanda's Recent Activities)

4 files included

PS ELDER COMMANDA'S Prayer for the May 15, 2009 Investiture Ceremony is now pasted below – June 4, 2009 update:

Kwey Kwey:

My greetings to Your Excellencies, and Honoured Guests:

I send my deep regrets that I am not able to be with you all on this special occasion. At ninety five, your body does not always allow you do all the things you might wish.

When I look back at history over the years, I continue to be inspired by those who have contributed to strengthening respect for Mother Earth, promoting harmony amongst peoples and nations, and building a strong social safety net for all. These were the fundamental values of my ancestors, and I bring their dreams for a better world for all to this prayer at the May 2009 *Order of Canada* Investiture Ceremony. I am glad to be the face of the First Peoples amongst so many who serve society with passion and commitment. I offer my congratulations to them and wish them well in the effort to secure a better future for all. Our ancestral prophecies foretold the day when the all the peoples of the world would unite in Turtle Island to create such a world, and on a day like today, despite the darkness that surrounds us, I feel the strength of their conviction that a better world will emerge with the efforts of individuals. Megwetch to you all for this hope. Merci. *Ginawaydaganuc - We Are All Connected*. William Commanda

Kwey Kwey

Mes salutations à vos Excellences et Invités d'Honneurs;

C'est avec un profond regret que je vous fais part de mon incapacité à me joindre à vous pour cette occasion spéciale. À 95 ans, notre corps ne nous permet pas toujours de faire ce que nous souhaiterions.

Lorsque je regarde l'histoire au cours des années, je continue à être inspiré par ceux qui ont contribué à accroître le respect pour notre Mère Terre, à promouvoir l'harmonie entre les personnes et les nations et à construire une sécurité sociale forte pour tous. Ces valeurs fondamentales étaient celles de mes Ancêtres, et j'apporte leur rêve pour un monde meilleur pour tous à cette prière pour la Cérémonie d'Investiture de l'Ordre du Canada de mai 2009. Je suis heureux d'être le visage du peuple des Premières Nations parmi tant de gens qui servent la société avec passion et engagement. Je leur offre mes félicitations et leur souhaite du succès dans leurs efforts pour construire un meilleur futur pour tous. Nos prophéties ancestrales ont prédit le jour où les peuples de la Terre s'uniraient sur l'Île de la Tortue pour créer un tel monde et, par une journée telle que celle-ci, malgré la noirceur qui nous entoure, je ressens la force de leur conviction qu'un monde meilleur émergera par l'effort que font des individus.

Megwetch à tous pour cet espoir. Merci. *Ginawaydaganuc*. Nous sommes tous inter-reliés.