

A Circle of All Nations Project – March 5, 2014

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**A collaborative initiative with FANCV**

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

### **ISSUE**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) calls for submissions from indigenous peoples to studies currently being carried out by the Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as requested through resolution 24/10.

This note addresses the broad topic of justice, with respect to the *Circle of All Nations* work of late Indigenous Elder, Dr. William Commanda, OC, Algonquin, Canada, and his legacy vision for the establishment of the multi-faceted international *Asinabka* Indigenous Center at the Chaudiere Falls within Canada's capital city, on the ancient unsundered, unceded, unconquered sacred lands of his ancestors.

### **BACKGROUND**

William Commanda died on August 3, 2011 at the age of 98. For over forty years, he was Carrier of Wampum Belts, ancient sacred mnemonic relics of global significance, asserting their significance as instruments of Indigenous statements on inherent and unalienable values, principles, rights and justice (see note 1). In 1993, he presented the Wampum Belts at the first United Nations Conference of Indigenous Peoples, the *Cry of the Earth* Conference.

In addition, there were several other interventions at the UN level that he and other Indigenous colleagues engaged in – the first was to UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie (1946-1952), in 1946, when together with the Secretary of the North American Indigenous Nations Government, Jules Sioui, he was involved in actively seeking seats for Indigenous Peoples at this global forum. The quest for recognition finally manifested in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2008.

Consistent with the messages and legacy of the Wampum Belts, William Commanda engaged countless people nationally and internationally, as he worked for four critical issues throughout his long life:

- respect for Mother Earth (he led the Indigenous prayer at President Mitterand's PreRio conference in France, precursor of the UN's COP environmental work),
- assertion of Indigenous spirituality, culture, values and rights (his *Circle of All Nations* work), and
- promotion of racial harmony and peace building (initiated with the UN Declaration of the 2000 Millennium Decade of Peace, later animated in the UN International Day of Peace events).

## **THE JUSTICE PROJECT AND LOCATION**

William Commanda envisioned the concrete manifestation of this Indigenous work in the creation of a healing and peace building centre at the ancient sacred meeting place of his ancestors for over 6,000 years, (that is, the Chaudiere Falls within the heart of the Ottawa river watershed, between the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, which are dominated by Canada's founding cultures of the French and English, within Canada's National Capital Region).

Countless people, nationally and internationally, have endorsed this vision over the years, including at the UN level, and in 2010, the City of Ottawa, formally expressed its support of the work. In Fall 2013, the POGG (Aboriginal-Canada Think Tank Committee) presented a report indicative of its promotion of the Indigenous Centre proposal to the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues, Dr. James Anaya.

## **DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL**

The salient details of this proposal include:

- Undamming the Sacred Chaudière Falls,
- Creating a city park and historical interpretive centre
- Building a conference and hotel complex, and
- Building an Indigenous centre

An illustrated bilingual brochure detailing the project is attached. Internationally renowned Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal has developed conceptual designs for the realization of this vision.

In view of the acceleration of global crises on environment and peace building, we assert the critical importance of the inclusion of the Indigenous voice. Thus, in this proposal, then, we address the notion of justice in the broadest of terms – the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples as equal partners in the global community.

Finally, we add that this place is under threat of development; in that event, its unique character and potential will be entirely and irrevocably extinguished.

Support at the United Nations level will advance the drive for true and profound justice for Indigenous peoples, constitute a concrete statement of reconciliation with nature and sacred heritage lands, and advance peace-building in a key globally important capital city in an inclusive and influential manner.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Formal endorsement of the legacy vision of late Indigenous leader William Commanda for an International Indigenous Centre at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, Ottawa, Canada, as designed by Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal, by the Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism

## ATTACHMENTS

Biography of William Commanda

Brochures describing the proposed project

Conceptual design by Douglas Cardinal

[www.asinabka.com](http://www.asinabka.com); [www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca); [www.djarchitect.com](http://www.djarchitect.com)

NOTE: Re: Wampum Belts: From 1987, (on the occasion of the Aboriginal Constitutional Debates called by the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, as required by the then newly repatriated, Canadian Charter of Rights), William Commanda presented these artifacts on the public stage, asserting their significance as Indigenous statements on inherent and unalienable values, principles, rights and justice. Presently these are being studied at the community level with respect to their relevance for presentation for consideration for UNECSO *Memories of the World* designation.)

Additional information is available upon request

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