



**JUNE 21, 2014 CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS MESSAGE REGARDING WILLIAM  
COMMANDA'S LEGACY VISION FOR THE SACRED CHAUDIÈRE SITE**

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COMMANDA’S LEGACY VISION FOR THE SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE  
FROM ROMOLA V. THUMBADOO**

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# **CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS MESSAGE REGARDING WILLIAM COMMANDA'S LEGACY VISION FOR THE SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE FROM ROMOLA V. THUMBADOO**

**June 21, 2014.**

## **SECTION ONE – AN OPEN LETTER**

### **1. A Personal Preamble**

My June 18, 2014 Capricorn Horoscope in the Minneapolis morning paper read: “Your conscience will be chirping like Jiminy Cricket, so listen up. The others in your group may not be so aware of the voice inside their heads. You bear the moral imperative.”

I drafted the outline of this Sacred Chaudière’s Site and Victoria Island Issues Paper on route from Omaha to Minneapolis on June 16 (South Africa’s Freedom Day) as my Greyhound bus passed Pipestone, Minnesota.

I had driven Grandfather William Commanda there in 1998. I was just quitting my work with the Aboriginal Justice Learning Network and the Federal Department of Justice then – work that had fully acquainted me with the shameful history of overt and systemic racist oppression of the First Peoples of the country, but that had also affirmed the potential for creative and cooperative resurgence of the new peoples of the Seven Fires Prophecy, First Peoples and newcomers both, embarked on a journey towards reconciliation, healing and justice. The fledgling effort was stillborn – many power and control factors contributed to its demise: politics, entrenched bureaucracies, fears, distrust, greed and incapacity. But the work introduced me to William Commanda in 1997, and in joining forces with him, I embarked on a new phase of relationship-building with First Peoples, in the co-creation of his *Circle of All Nations, Culture of Peace*, with countless others - an unfunded global-eco community dedicated to advancing Indigenous wisdom, respect for Mother Earth, racial harmony and peace-building.

The 1998 stop in Pipestone Minnesota was significant for several reasons. The ancient sacred pipe stone site, shared by different tribes over the centuries, was hosting a sacred sundance ceremony; we arrived around four in the afternoon of the eighth day, the last day. There was ribbon and tobacco prayer already tied on the sundance tree for William Commanda, though scarcely anyone knew he might be there coming all the way from Maniwaki, Quebec. American Indian Movement leader Clyde Belcourt said to the younger folk gathered there for the solemn ceremony, *You may not realize this but our leader from the North East has arrived. The eagle, for whom we have been waiting these past eight days, has finally presented herself - Eagle is announcing the arrival of our elder.* He was acknowledging the unique stature of the then 85 year old Algonquin chief and elder. Still holding the title of Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government, he was also the Carrier of the Sacred Wampum Belt heritage of the peoples of Turtle Island, and his singularly independent stature as spiritual and political leader of

Indigenous Peoples of the continent of North America was being affirmed in the southern reaches of Turtle Island.

My June 16, 2014 drive through the Pipestone sacred site ignited a renewed passion to affirm William Commanda's Legacy Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site in the capital city of Canada.

In part this was triggered by a City of Ottawa announcement regarding June 24, 2014 consultation with Windmill Development Group on development at the Sacred Chaudière Site. By the end of the bus trip, I had drafted the outline for this document.

The June 18, 2014 horoscope message exhorts me to fly with my conscience and assert William Commanda's vision anew and out loud. I cannot do otherwise; I cannot wait longer.

The moral imperative: a revitalized Canada, energized by a strengthened First Peoples, with all taking our *rightful* places under the Sacred Tree, as envisioned by Black Elk, and at the place of the Sacred Water Drum.

## **2. Open Letter on behalf of the Legacy Vision of Indigenous Leader, Dr. William Commanda, OC, Carrier of the Sacred Wampum Belt Heritage**

I, Romola Vasantha Thumbadoo, share these messages, as expression of my on-going commitment to advance understanding of the lifetime work, passion, commitment and unprecedented vision of William Commanda, a humble Indigenous elder and shaman of the Ottawa River Watershed, who, as he himself said, was just a little man trying to do big things.

I believe the things he was doing are of critical and urgent global importance – redirecting our attention and energies to Mother Earth and our relationship with all her children. In a world now grappling with climate change of unmanageable proportions, with war and bloodshed and violence dominating life in all corners of the world, with unbridled capitalism driving us further and further away from true happiness, peace and health, and leaving a bleak future for our children, the messages he affirmed and asserted throughout his long life, and with increasing urgency during the last twenty-five, serve as luminous guideposts driving my understanding, and undoubtedly that of countless others.

I believe his work is of deep importance to you. I believe his legacy vision offers a vital pathway out of an ever-darkening global future.

William Commanda developed and asserted a vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site, the ancient meeting place of his Indigenous Ancestors, a fully inclusive vision for shared public space in the heart of the country, in the National Capital Region of Canada, a big vision of Indigenous, national and international significance, and he lit this fire publicly in the capital city when he was presented with the Key to the City of Ottawa in 2006. This vision was endorsed by the City of Ottawa in 2010.

Now the vision lies under threat of extinction, of being snuffed out by apparent new capitalist and neo-colonial development interests in his ancestral lands.

The constraints strangling the Indigenous voice and denying the legitimate presence and place of First Peoples has become increasingly clear to the public at large over the past three years. Further, colonial and historical realities in Canada have divided the Algonquin Peoples of the Ottawa River Watershed via provincial boundaries, on-reserve and off-reserve segregation, federal and provincial priorities, language, religion, land claims strife and in countless other destructive and divisive ways. As such, they have not as yet come together to address the critical issues at play at the sacred ancestral heartland of their as yet unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered but appropriated territory. In fact, few have even seen the special place, removed from the traditional expanses of their traditional territory as these *Mamiwini Anicinabe*, *Nomad Real People* have been during historical times. Neither is the larger national and international Indigenous community involved in discussions pertaining to the future of a sacred meeting place of historical importance to them too; they too are struggling to shake off the history of colonialism, oppression, division and poverty that has plagued them since the coming of the new people. Indigenous Peoples are undertaking the difficult walk on the tightrope

between two different worlds – while keeping the fire of their beliefs alive – surely the non-Indigenous world should be making more sincere efforts to understand and not undermine or patronize them? It is clear the global mainstream community is growing increasingly dissatisfied with the world we have created; we leave scorched trails behind us everywhere. Many are now looking to the Indigenous for other ways forward. William Commanda was one of those remarkable people who could see and demonstrate that the path of unity anticipated by the *Seven Fires Prophecy* was attainable and he animated this reality in his Circle of All Nations work. But, we are not all there yet.

Under these circumstances, the Sacred Chaudière Site within the capital city is rendered vulnerable to other interests.

Consistent with the messages of the *1700s Sharing and Welcoming Three Figure Wampum Belt*, William Commanda left a vision for the Indigenous Peoples to draw the hands of the newcomers together in friendship. Those of us who were blessed with this welcome – and there have been thousands over the years – must come together to take our rightful place and advance his work and visionary legacy. It is a profound responsibility in the creation of a Canada that can truly become the home of all. This is the heritage that William Commanda presented us with – a pathway into the future. Canadians at large are the occupiers and holders of the Sacred Land within the National Capital Region. Already much at the Sacred Site has been lost to newcomer history and priorities. The latest proposals for development at the Chaudière Islands represents a continued charge forward into a never-ending colonizing trajectory that brings no vitality to the Source. We all need to shake off the chains of the past. Indeed, most of us have come here to shake off similar chains in other lands. Those of us who have been awakened by Grandfather Commanda's tireless work must do what we can to ensure the enshrinement of this Indigenous vision in the heart of this country – it is our pathway to self-respect. This is the moral imperative. And all of us can try to emulate this – we will only grow in the process; countless people from diverse backgrounds, already transformed by William Commanda's outreach and deep wisdom, will attest to this.

*This is my Mother Earth*, William Commanda said; *how can you sell your mother? Only a fool would sell his mother.* It is the Indigenous Peoples who grant us safe passageway to the Mother, as many of us who have left our original homelands behind have learned. William Commanda affirmed this reconnection with the Sacred Mother for so many of us – let us now take responsibility to keep that energetic connection alive at the Sacred Meeting Place in the heart of this country. If not, what imprint do we leave in the earth?

If we sleep longer, it will be difficult to rouse ourselves out of the stupor.

I invite you to *dream big*, as Grandfather Commanda did, to safeguard and animate his living legacy for all of us, including First Peoples, and for the Seventh Generation. Then, come and join us and keep vigil at the Sacred Chaudière Site, fanning the embers of William Commanda's eternal prayer at the waters edge.

I invite you to review this contribution to the consultations called by the City of Ottawa and Windmill Development Group and add your views to the discussions. It is of critical importance for all of us.

For further information, see [www.asinabka.com](http://www.asinabka.com) and [www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca); and contact [circleofallnations@sympatico.ca](mailto:circleofallnations@sympatico.ca) for specific references and documents.

## SECTION TWO – THE SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE AND VICTORIA ISLAND ISSUES PAPER – Key Background Information

### 1. William Commanda – 11 November, 1913 – 3 August, 2011

- **Ancestry:** Algonquin of the Ottawa River Watershed; oldest known ancestor (1760s – before the Royal Commission of 1763) was Kokomis Commandant from Lac Commandant/Papineau; descendent of shaman and canoe builders; direct ancestors confronted Philomen Wright at the Sacred Chaudiere Falls in early 1800s (True history written by *his* daughter, B. Wright in *The White Chief*); Great, great grandfather Pakinawatik secured/safeguarded the first reserve in 1854, before there was Canada, Quebec or Ontario; he was Carrier of ancient Wampum Belts of sacred, mnemonic, record keeping importance; staunch fighter for lands and rights of Algonquins but tricked into “surrender for lease” of some lots of land, and subsequently died of a heart attack; leadership family, with four serving as chiefs; father Alonzo “the world’s best guide” (Jim Durant in *Saturday Post*); Uncle Gabriel Commanda, veteran of World War One, prospector and father of gold mining in Val d’Or; promoter of environmental stewardship, and racial harmony, and honoured as such today in Quebec; exemplary family of leaders, shaman, Wampum Belt heritage carriers, land-based knowledge, canoe builders and peace builders with direct ties to the Sacred Chaudière Site.
- **Political /Historical/ Community Influence Context:** Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government, predecessor of Assembly of First Nations; Chief of River Desert/Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg 19 years; welcomed new Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau to Maniwaki, and influenced upturning of the White Paper of 1969; Global outreach – France, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Bahamas, North America and Mexico; leadership role in the United Nations *Cry of the Earth Indigenous Conference*, and other UN Peace and environmental activities; National Capital Region outreach with federal, provincial and municipal governments, single-handedly establishing awareness that the capital city sits on Algonquin territory during the past decade; Spiritual Elder with Wittenberg Centre, Prayer Vigil in Washington, Sun Bow Five Walk for Mother Earth; Special Advisor to the Wolf Project for advancing racial harmony; and founder, Circle of All Nations ([www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca))
- **Sacred Wampum Belts** - Carrier of ancient Wampum Belts of sacred, mnemonic, record keeping importance (and to be presented to the United Nations as a Memory of the World) – Ancient Seven Fires Prophecy Belt from pre-historical times; 1700s Welcoming and Sharing Three Figure Wampum Belt, and the historical 1896 Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt affirming territorial connections with both Canada and the United States. Critical messages of the Sacred Wampum Belts shared widely and with increasing urgency by William Commanda, thereby transferring responsibility for the animation of their messages to all, including non-Indigenous peoples.



- **Acknowledgements** – Recipient of countless awards, honours and acknowledgements; the key of relevance to this work: Canoe Builder Award; Wolf Project Award (1998); Honorary Doctoral Degrees from University of Ottawa (2005) and l’université du Québec-Outaouais (2011), i.e. provinces of Ontario and Quebec affirm Indigenous wisdom; Key to the City (2006); UN International Day of Peace Award (2006); appointed Officer of the Order of Canada (2008); Lifetime National Aboriginal Achievement Award recipient (2010).
- **Visionary** – Founder of the *Circle of All Nations* global eco-community dedicated to advancing environmental stewardship and racial harmony; legacy contemporary vision for the ancient meeting grounds at the Sacred Chaudière Site; countless other influential contributions to environmental issues, Indigenous rights, language and culture, and social justice concerns.

## 2. Sacred Cultural Heritage Site

- **Geological history** - *Asinabka, Place of Glare Rocks* – Name, site artifacts and myth reflects ancient Indigenous knowledge of earth transformation: site comprised of walls of ancient ocean floor from 450 million years ago; and also holds evidence of the 12,000 year history of the post Wisconsin Glacier and Champlain Sea, Great Lakes and waterways of the American North East; site of the circular rapids (Chaudière Falls, second only to the Niagara Falls, and of the (formerly) second wildest river of North America, the *Kichissippi*, Ottawa River, at its confluence with the Rideau and Gatineau (a natural medicine wheel with the Ottawa running West to East, and the Gatineau and Rideau flowing from South and North, from Ontario and Quebec; vicinity of red ochre mine, Calumet and Allumette (Pipe and Fire/Matchstick Islands); site of the oldest mountains on Mother Earth.

Did you know that in the Geological Time and Formations Table, *Algonkian* refers to an era of geological history between the *Archeozoic*, the most ancient era from 3,800,000,000 years ago, and the *Paleozoic*, which emerged 620,000,000 years ago, with the earliest records of the precursors to life: invertebrates, spores and marine algae, embedded in rock? (Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1987); the geological name for these rocks formations are clay concretions; they are found in ancient glacial lakes. Remnants and proof of ancient life are stored within the mycelia, in the bacteria that formed the earliest building blocks of life! Two of those glacial remnant lakes existed here in the Ottawa River Watershed.

- **Sacred Meeting Place from Time Immemorial** – With the retreat of the Champlain Sea, from 12,000 years ago, there is evidence of the Paleo Indians/ancient maritime navigators, visiting emerging islands and bedrock of the South March Highlands and Gatineau Hills; in vicinity of Ouiseau Rocks pictographs; archeological finds of turquoise from Mexico, copper from Lake

Superior and ramah chert from the Labrador are indicative of the nomadic reach of the ancient travellers of 5 to 6 thousand years ago; site of fisheries/meeting place; place for ceremonial acknowledgement and tobacco ceremony; pipes and other archaeological items provide evidence of Indigenous presence and ceremony; canoe routes followed river highways; portage routes indicate land passage: here, in Ottawa at Dow's Falls, the over-land route runs along present-day Preston Street to the Lebreton Flats and the Sacred Chaudière Falls, confirming how important this meeting place was; across, there is the Lac des Fees, the French name indicative of the Indigenous reference to the Little People, and sacred associations; French missionary Sagard noted the fires of ceremonial sweat lodges dotting the landscape; in 1600s, Samuel de Champlain provides description of the Indigenous ceremonial rituals that inspired future artists; in 1803 Algonquins of Lac Commandant area (William Commanda's people) object to Philomen Wright's cutting of their sugar bushes, and conduct conciliatory ceremony at the Chaudière site; in the 1800s, newcomers flood the Ottawa River areas; the 1830s rape and impalement/murder of an Algonquin girl by workers at Parliament Hill signals the reasons for the growing absence of Algonquin visibility at the Sacred Site; but Indigenous presence at the site was not extinguished, despite industrial development and contamination at Victoria and Chaudière Islands, and island reconfiguration, bridge building, establishment of logging and pulp and paper mills, hydro dams, newcomer presence, and diseases like cholera. In the seventies, the people gathered there again, creating an Indian Embassy and encampments of resistance to federal programs and policies; the nineties saw the active return of Indigenous Peoples and ceremonies to Victoria Island; many Elders, including late Algonquin Elder Frank Decontie, Late Grandmothers Lillian Pitawankwak, Irene Lindsay, Jeorgina Laroque and others led sweat lodges and other healing ceremonies here; William Commanda himself cooked and fed the homeless and lost, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous; he also hosted annual Solstice and Equinox Pipe Ceremonies here from the late nineties till his death in 2011; in collaboration with Elders Without Borders, he hosted the 13 Moons Gathering of Indigenous Elders from around the world here; in collaboration with Plenty Canada, he organized Sustainable Relationship workshops, transforming language in environmental discussion. With the prayer that accompanied the release of the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, he drew attention to the polluted Ottawa River; (he asked the leadership there whether they would be prepared to drink the water – for him, the salvation of the Indigenous Peoples and the salvation of the waters was one and the same; almost 20 years later, the same issue is evident with the battles around fracking and pipelines and First Peoples lands; if the waters become unfit to drink, as anticipated as a dire concern in the Seven Fires Prophecy, then what lies ahead? It is already projected that the wars of the future will be Water Wars.) In 2006, he was presented with the Key to the City at this site, and this affirms public acknowledgement of the significance of the place to Indigenous Peoples. The winter of 2011/12 saw a return of Indigenous Peoples from across North America and even South America to the Sacred Chaudière Site, with the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence, the Idle No More movement, the winter of First

Peoples unrest, activism and prayer, and the stream of walkers from across the country returning to the Source, as did their nomadic ancestors for countless centuries. Elder and Sacred Fire Keeper Peter Decontie has kept the fire burning steadily at the Sacred Site over the past two decades. It is not out.

- **Thoughts about the Sacred Chaudière Falls and the American Eel**

Prayer for water, joy in water, valuing and respecting water – this was a central feature throughout Grandfather William Commanda’s long life. He was born to this water-based heritage. His ancestors were the nomads – the *Mamiwinini* – who travelled the water highways of North America in their iconic birch bark canoes. He believed they were descendants of the ancient Maritime hunters of the North Atlantic Seaboard, who, over ten thousand years ago, arrived here after the Wisconsin Ice Age, and left evidence of their presence on the retreating shorelines of the ancient Champlain Sea, right here in Asinabka, the place of bare rock, the place of glare rock. The capital city of Canada now stands at the confluence of the primary river of the territory of the Algonquins: the Mighty Kichissippi, the Ottawa, flowing west to east, joined by its major tributaries, the Gatineau from the north and the Rideau from the south, showing in the geography how, despite historical division, Quebec and Ontario are connected.

Nature’s own Medicine Wheel is etched on this special sacred part of the Mother Earth, centered and spun by the circular rapids, the *Akikpautik*, the Chaudieres. This place held deep spiritual significance to the ancient peoples, and the earliest newcomers to the continent witnessed the homage paid to the boiling waters. The *Akikpautik* symbolized the bowl of the sacred pipe, with its constant spray taking the prayers of the people to the cosmic creator in perpetuity. The underground rock formations, the karsts, and the underground rivers sang messages from the womb of Mother Earth at this sacred place, and the thundering water drum of the Chaudière Rapids called the people to the source.

William Commanda told people repeatedly that water was a critical natural element that we could not survive without for long. He described the living Gaia, his Mother Earth – the rivers were her veins, he said; he described the Earth’s natural cycles – snow thaws and spring rains flushed out the debris accumulated in the waters in Nature’s natural cleansing processes – he bemoaned the dams stifling the movement of the mighty rivers of North America at every turn – and especially so at the Sacred Chaudière Rapids. He noted the eight thousand barrages impeding the movement of water and contributing to the decimation of the ancient Eels, fish precious to his ancestors, throughout the St. Lawrence River Watershed. Now when we hear how the Hoover Dam is no longer able to sustain the Las Vegas community into the foreseeable future and how artificial floods have to be created on the Colorado River to replicate the seasonal cleansing inherent to the intelligence of Nature’s Law, or about the impacts of invasive species, some begin to understand the enormity of William Commanda’s wisdom and the wisdom of Indigenous Elders more deeply.

The Chaudière Falls, the country's greatest natural treasure, has been obscured from the reverence it used to be accustomed to receiving from time immemorial, and really, it never been seen or heard by the vast majority of the people in the capital city. It was a meeting place of the Indigenous Peoples of North America for literally thousands of years, with evidence of human ancestors of the Paleolithic period marking their time here. Indigenous presence at the great circular rapids was noted by Samuel de Champlain on his first trip past the heart of the Medicine Wheel, where the Mighty Kichissippi (Ottawa) flows west to east and is joined by the Rideau and Gatineau. The Indigenous Peoples, rich in lives of symbol, knew this is where the wheel of life spins, and they honoured the place with prayer as they passed it on their canoes. How superstitious, pronounced Champlain, as he proceeded past the pounding rapids - that is, until his canoe caught on the rocks, and he broke a leg, and then had to pray to his god for help; fortunately for him, nature was there, and a tree saved his life. But Queen Victoria did realize this was the power place, when she selected the *Asinabka, Place of Glare Rock*, for the capital city.

When Philomen Wright arrived in this area in 1801/2, William Commanda's direct ancestors were alarmed – their sugar bushes were being cut down and they challenged this. Wright produced a paper, an agreement signed by their ancestors, he said, giving him the right to do this (Royal Proclamation of 1763). They were horrified by this *Loup Gareau, this monstrous thing*. After the devastating two centuries of European attack on their lands, waters, trees, beavers, language, spiritual practices, lives, health and relationships, they were a decimated peoples, now facing a new threat at the sacred heart of their territory. Wright's own daughter writes that the Algonquins responded with prayer, sacrifice and tobacco ceremony, to appease and transform the acquisitive and destructive energy they saw in the felling of the precious maple medicine trees.

Two centuries later, William Commanda offered prayer and ceremony again to show the path to reconciliation and healing of relationships, with nature and amongst people. A humble and inspirational man from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, Quebec, beloved to people around the world as Grandfather and founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, he reclaimed the place of his people in the National Capital Region, and he presented a mighty, inclusive vision for the Chaudière Site. He saw it as public space, not private, and he ignited a fire and passion for this dream in many hearts and minds, and not just Indigenous ones, to honour and celebrate nature; he envisioned a sanctuary for individuals and communities, for bridging multiple cultural divides, for repatriating Indigenous plants and biodiversity, and for protecting water life and the American Eel, *Manoshkadosh*.

He added his voice to the call to place the Eel on the endangered species list: "Today, the plight of the Eel must awaken us to the crucial need to transform our relationship with Mother Earth and All Our Relations, and to awaken us to the pivotal role of Indigenous Peoples in this process. I believe that Eel spirit is

intrinsic to the Sacred Seven Fire Prophecy Wampum Belt. This unique and mysterious ancient creature was of tremendous significance to the original peoples of the eastern coast of North America, and in the stories of my ancestors, it was plentiful beyond imagination; the Eel was of great spiritual, nutritional and material importance to the people from time immemorial. Intimately connected with peoples of the land, the Eel played a pivotal role in the R. v Marshall landmark legal victory in the recognition of Indigenous rights. ...

The plight of the American Eel is finally obliging us to reexamine our relationship with the natural world, and to take concrete steps to entrench survival and coexistence for all life forms, and governments are now implementing legislation to address these crucial concerns. We have to be especially diligent with species on endangered or threatened lists. I mention the American Eel here, but may I also mention that I am deeply concerned about the Lake Sturgeon, a prehistoric fish so plentiful in the stories of my parents, and the salmon; and I do not hear the frogs at my lake much any more. We need governments to listen and learn from the voices in communities, and to take an active leadership role to educate the public, developers and industry on these critical issues of our times.”

(Seven live eels were found at Victoria Island exactly a year after William Commanda’s death – August 3, 2012, and now Eel authority, Dr. J. Casselman reports that there are young eels in the Mississippi River upstream from the Chaudière’s – they join the effort to free the Chaudière. His prayer is powerful!)

### **3. Synopsis of Development of the Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site**

- 1970s Douglas Cardinal and Jean Pigot (National Capital Commission) identify Victoria Island as site for an Indigenous Centre
- 1990s – Development of ideas for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island grow
- 1998 – Presentation to the Algonquin Nations Tribal Council by Elders William Commanda and Peter Decontie, and Douglas Cardinal, Architect – supported
- 2000 – 2002 Road trips to all Algonquin communities in Quebec and Ontario, to develop key components of the vision
- 2000 – Presentation of vision to Her Excellency, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson at *Circle of All Nations* Millennium Peace Gathering
- 1998 – 2002 (and on to 2011) – Development of Vision at Annual *Circle of All Nations* Gatherings at Bitobi Lake, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg
- 2003 – Gathering of Algonquin Elders to present Report on the Vision for the Indigenous Centre in Maniwaki – fully supported by Algonquins from all communities on both sides of the Ottawa River
- 2003 - Larry McDermott undertakes graduate research into governance structures for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island, in consultation with William Commanda
- 2004 – With support from Ministry of Canadian Heritage and the National Capital Commission, a draft Memorandum of Recommendation was prepared; Conceptual plans were refined by Douglas Cardinal, Architect

- 2006 – NCC endorses project and earmarks \$35m for commencement of two-phased development
- 2006 – also the year of the federal Sponsorship Scandal – and political priorities shift
- 2006 – Elder Commanda is presented with the Key to the City of Ottawa, and he presents Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site
- 2006 – Circle of All Nations Waterlife Workshop draws attention to the degradation of the Ottawa River
- 2006 – Elder Commanda serves as Honorary Chair to the Committee to Designate the Ottawa River a Heritage River
- 2006-7 – Expansion of Hydro Development at Sacred Chaudière Site is challenged by Circle of All Nations and colleagues
- 2007 - Eric L. Smith, Carleton University graduate student, prepares a research report on removal of dams and restoration for Circle of All Nations
- 2011 - Eric L. Smith, Carleton University graduate student presents his Masters thesis on Indigenous/Colonial/Settler relations at the Sacred Chaudière Site
- 2010 – Elder Commanda presents Comprehensive Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site and Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island
- 2010 – City of Ottawa endorses the Comprehensive Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site and Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island
- 2011 – William Commanda presents the Comprehensive Vision to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and to Governor General Michaëlle Jean, with respect to The Honour of the Crown
- 2013 – Douglas Cardinal upgrades the conceptual designs for the Sacred Chaudière Site ([www.djarchitct.com](http://www.djarchitct.com))
- 2013 – Peace and Good Governance Citizen's group endorses support for Indigenous Centre to Federal Government and Minister Baird; and to UN Special Rapporteur On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 2014 - FANCV presents Commanda Legacy vision to UN Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 2014 – Circle of All Nations celebrates the Commanda/Cardinal vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site
- Circle of All Nations, Lindsey Lambert and others reassert theme of Freeing the Falls, the Jewel in Crown in the Capital City

#### **4. The Sacred Chaudière Site and the vision and commitment of three exemplary Indigenous rights leaders of international renown and relevance – William Commanda, Douglas Cardinal and Donald Marshall Junior**

- The work to develop, articulate and advance the vision for Indigenous presence in the capital city, at the Sacred Meeting Place of Indigenous Peoples from across America from *time immemorial* was led primarily and tirelessly by **William Commanda**, Indigenous activist, chief, record keeper, wampum belt carrier, shaman, diplomat, peace-maker and visionary par excellence – a statesman

emeritus. His work is referenced in this document, and in the [www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca) and [www.asinabka.com](http://www.asinabka.com) websites. A brief google search reveals the extensiveness of his reach and influence, accomplished entirely without the support of any formal structure.

- The other creative genius and Indigenous activist, world renowned architect **Douglas Cardinal**, has also been intensely engaged in this initiative, in his case since 1970, when, in conjunction with his work on the Canadian Museum of Civilization, (now History); he also advanced the vision for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island with the National Capital Commission. An activist in his own right, he advanced the struggle for Indian control of native education in 1969; he also created iconic architectural masterpieces resonant of Indigenous and earth based energies grounded in his spiritual beliefs as pipe carrier and conductor of sacred sweat lodge ceremonies. Countless peoples around the world, and including Indigenous students, attest to the incomparable healing and regenerative energy of his creations, for example at the Museum of Civilization, (now History), the Native American Museum at the Mall in Washington DC, and the First Nations University in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Since 1998, he has been committed to developing William Commanda's vision for the Indigenous Centre in the capital city in Canada. This work will complement the Indigenous presence in Washington DC, consistent with the message and energy of the Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt. He is now in his eightieth year. It is critically important to entrench his energy at the Sacred Chaudière Site without further delay.

- **Donald Marshall Junior**, of Mi'q M'aq heritage, and hereditary leadership by birthright, is the youth who was incarcerated at age 17 for a murder he had not committed, and whose ceaseless personal fight for truth and justice took decades and two justice inquiries to unfold. His enormous sacrifice and contributions have served not only the cause of Aboriginal Justice, but impacted the development of the Wrongfully Convicted legacy, sparked by the story of Rubin Hurricane Carter – the Indigenous broke the trail into the search for justice and entrenchment of Indigenous restorative and healing values, and now citizens at large are beneficiaries of the transformation of the justice system. Donald Marshall Junior and William Commanda both met in the context of their cross-cultural work with the Aboriginal Justice Learning Network, and he joined forces to animate the *Circle of All Nations* and develop the vision for the Indigenous Centre at the Sacred Chaudière Site. He also challenged the justice system with respect to being charged for eel fishing in his traditional territory, drawing on legal commitments from 1764 to advance the cause of Indigenous rights on the national platform.

Donald Marshall Junior used to say, *A Legend Never Dies*. Both he and William Commanda have contributed immeasurably to advancing Indigenous wisdom, justice, self-respect, healing, cross-cultural understanding and peace-building of

an extraordinary quality, and till their deaths, while looking worn and emaciated they remained bright-eyed and vision-inspired, and worked to advance the work to entrench Indigenous presence in the sacred meeting place of their ancestors – undoubtedly, they will continue to energize the effort through you and me – and undoubtedly, all Canadians, and the world at large will reap the benefits of their sacrifices, visionary foresight, wisdom and tremendous generosity of spirit and love.

## 5. Current Challenges

At this time, the Windmill Development Group presents the latest challenges to the contemporary Legacy Indigenous Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site.

### a. Land Issues

Several key thoughts come to mind:

- As per William Commanda's consultation with all Algonquin communities on both sides of the Ottawa River, (March, 2003), *all* affirm interests in the Sacred Chaudière Site
- The establishment of the reserves at Maniwaki, Golden Lake and Temiscaming in the 1850s, before there was a Canada, Quebec and Ontario attests to the presence and rights of the Algonquins from both sides of the Ottawa River
- During Elder Commanda's first meeting with the National Capital Commission (2003), he asked for papers to attest to the NCC's right to Victoria Island and vicinity – no documents were produced during a subsequent meeting with NCC lawyers
- In 2007, Domtar representative F. Jette revealed that his company leased the Chaudière Island property in perpetuity for approximately \$100 a year, renewable every twenty years, a leasing arrangement developed in 1856, after the Algonquin peoples had been driven from the area
- In 2008 and in 2014, *Circle of All Nations* (with William Commanda first and Douglas Cardinal subsequently) wrote to Domtar to propose a non-contentious return of the Sacred Chaudière Site for the creation of the Asinabka legacy vision of William Commanda, a gesture of reconciliation and karmic rebalancing, in view of the centuries of advantage to developers, and of site desecration, a gesture that would be beneficial to both First Peoples and all others now occupying their ancestral lands. This has not manifested
- The land issues are contentious and as yet unresolved. A brief exposé of the issues extracted from the Master's Thesis of Eric L. Smith (2011) reveals that the site is a *jurisdictional quagmire*: "In terms of land ownership and uses, Chaudière Island



is a mix of federal (crown) land, managed by the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), and private land and industrial infrastructure, owned and managed by Domtar Corporation. Domtar has been the owner of the hydroelectric facility on Chaudière Island since acquiring the E.B Eddy properties from George Weston Co. in 1998. Through the administration of PWGSC, the Crown owns the hydraulic lots along the perimeter of Chaudière island and leases them to Domtar. The entire island is restricted to industrial use and public access is prohibited. Three principal parties share responsibilities for managing the dam, maintaining and setting water levels: Hydro-Ottawa, Hydro Quebec and Domtar Inc. The principals operate and maintain the dam under the corporate entity known as Chaudière Power Inc. The City of Ottawa owns Hydro-Ottawa Holdings Inc. while a subsidiary of Hydro-Ottawa: Energy Ottawa owns and operates two of the hydroelectric generating plants below the falls on the Ontario side. Politically, the interprovincial Ontario-Quebec border runs along the river north of Chaudière Island, situating the island within the city of Ottawa but at the western edge of the island, the interprovincial border dips to the south with the result that the Chaudière Ring Dam lies entirely within the city of Gatineau...For the National Capital Commission (NCC), the entire island and the waters of the Ottawa river fall within the category of partnership land, in which there is an ongoing federal role and involvement. The NCC considers Domtar properties to form part of the 'National interest land mass'- a "category of lands that are key to building the Capital over long term" (G. Dionne, personal communication, 2011) However the NCC and Domtar have no lease arrangements. The ring dam is excluded from NCC jurisdiction. The island, waters and the dam also exist within the Census Metropolitan Area of Ottawa Gatineau, the only of its kind in Canada to fall within two provinces." (Access full thesis exploring colonial relations at [www.asinabka.com](http://www.asinabka.com) 2011 Eric Smith Thesis on ASINABKA *An urban epicentre of decolonization in Canada: the Indigenous-Settler alliance to make a place for peace at Asinabka.*)

- The public at large is under the impression that Domtar has sold its rights to the Chaudière property to Windmill Development Group. Someone wrote, *I'm not a real estate agent, but it seems to me that holding a lease isn't having title to the land and therefore the ability to sell it.* In response to the question, is Windmill now the *leaseholder*, like Domtar, and earlier Weyerhaeuser rather than the *owner* of the lands, we have learned that City of Ottawa officials “understand that Windmill is not yet the outright owner of the Domtar lands at this time. The lands are under their control via an Agreement but they are not yet the full owner/leaseholder at this time” (Inner Urban (Wards 12, 13, 14, 15, 17). Further, according to the Land Registry, most of the island appears not to be owned by Domtar, but leased. It seems that only parcel 213, which is largely under water, is owned (Letters Patent of 1986) and that all other parcels are leased. (213 was originally owned by Eddy and in 2012, through Domtar, transferred to Chaudière Hydro). It is therefore still predominantly Crown land.... No treaties were ever signed with the Algonquins and it remains unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered Algonquin territory.

- While the Algonquins of Ontario have been engaged in land claim discussions, these remain contentious and unconcluded; still, the Algonquins of Ontario have nonetheless also asserted that any development at the Sacred Chaudière Site must be consistent with the vision of Grandfather William Commanda; and Algonquins from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, Quebec, William Commanda's home base, are a regular presence at Victoria Island. Further, as noted earlier, as per William Commanda's personal consultation with all Algonquin communities, *all* affirmed interests in the Sacred Chaudière Site and support for the multi-pronged vision ((March, 2003). Finally, the overwhelming support for the unifying work of the Algonquin Chief and Elder was reaffirmed by the fully inclusive Algonquin presence at his funeral on August 6, 2011)
- Grandfather Commanda's vision sees the Algonquins from both sides of the Ottawa River serving as hosts, but it also sees an equitable role and place for all First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples, from across the country at the Sacred Chaudière Site. This practice was always the historical reality at sacred sites (witness Pipestone, Minnesota), and is particularly so in this capital city. Hence First Peoples from across the country have a critical vested interest in the place
- The vision for the site was developed with the passionate input and contribution of his larger *Circle of All Nations* global eco-community over fifteen years (see [www.circleofallnations.ca](http://www.circleofallnations.ca) for extensive background information) and they are also deeply entrenched in his plan for the Sacred Site; this includes Settler allies, organizations, and other international friends and partners
- Consistent with his interpretation of the 1700s Welcoming and Sharing Three Figure Wampum Belt, Grandfather Commanda also projected this as a place for acknowledgement and review of historical and industrial development at the site (it is noted that Energy Ottawa has commenced embarking on such community-based information events over the past two years)
- Mindful also of commitment to Mother Earth, he envisioned a relationship with land in the form of the restoration of a contaminated brownfield to a "Central Eco-Park Medicine Garden" on Chaudière Island, at a Chaudière Falls freed to the fullest extent possible, thereby also "freeing" the endangered American Eel. This revitalized space is to serve as an urban sanctuary for all, drawing the French (Quebec) and English (Ontario) Canada and all the citizens of the National Capital Region together with the First Peoples of the continent under the healing umbrella of nature, and consistent with 1700s Welcoming and Sharing Three Figure Wampum Belt
- It is a vision of profound sharing and interconnection, and is the manifestation of his prayer, *GINAWAYDAGANUC*

## b. Some concerns regarding the new development proposals

The focus of this paper is not really the Windmill Development Group's proposals; rather, it is the reiteration and clarification of the William Commanda Legacy Vision for the sacred meeting place of his direct ancestors in the heart of the country.

However, the Windmill Notice of the City of Ottawa Community Consultation, (Join us on June 24, as Windmill Developments and the City of Ottawa host the second community information session for the redevelopment of properties on Albert Island Chaudière Island, and the riverfront in downtown Gatineau), and notice that overall conceptual plans **will be submitted to the Ottawa and Gatineau City Councils to help shape the new zoning on both sides, warrant some specific remarks.**

First, it is important for me to point out that in these times, after the national and public revelations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, after the historical winter of unrest in 2011/12 and the most visible presence of Indigenous Peoples at the Sacred Chaudière Site (hunger strike, Idle No More, walks), and the continued daily media presentation of First Peoples and the many urgent issues of concern to them, it is offensive even to non-Indigenous peoples and certainly to Grandfather William Commanda's friends to hear European terminology and ideas (Isles, Little Amsterdam, European malls) branded on such a critically important Sacred Indigenous Site.

It is most disturbing that plans for massive high rise condo development were not presented clearly as the proposed plan for the area in December 2013 consultation – it throws into question the nature of the assumed support of 900 participants (and further, attendance does not imply support), and others as revealed in media coverage (Algonquin College, Ottawa Riverkeepers, Ecology Ottawa, Bridgehead, etc.)

Finally, it is very disturbing to see contests to name the historical Sacred Site as a part of this development proposal. Are we not past the era of uncensored colonial expropriation and appropriation?

As Canada approaches its 150th birthday in 2017, many of us want to move beyond the burdensome heritage of our colonial pasts, and regenerate relationships of friendship and equality with the First Peoples of this land. Beyond the *Honour of the Crown*, Grandfather William Commanda has set his marker high for us. May we find the humility to rise to the occasion before it is entirely too late. In an age of accelerating climate change and with the disastrous ramifications of unbridled capitalism, people are searching for genuine paths out of the morass. Prophecies of peoples from around the world have led many of us to the *Elder Sibling*, the Indigenous Peoples, for a new blueprint for life on earth. It is becoming increasingly clear that not only our self-respect but also our very survival is dependent on this.

Surely we can find ways of negotiating a better way forward together?

## **6. A Critical Consideration – First Peoples/Canada Relations in 2014**

- Crisis, tensions and pressures are mounting in First Nations/Federal relations and they are fracturing fragile First Nations institutional structures
- Indian Residential Schools atrocities and Truth and Reconciliation Commission work has presented public witnessing of historical wrongs, abuses and injustices at the hands of government and church and has revealed the continued devastating impacts on multi-generations
- Despite a decade of justice inquiries in the eighties, and new policing, corrections, and justice initiatives over the past twenty-five years, in 2012, the Correctional Investigator released reports severely critical of the criminal justice system and its treatment of Aboriginal Peoples
- Environmental clashes are on the rise and gaining increasing visibility; whereas in the past, many struggles were hidden in remote First Nations communities, today the public at large is growing aware of the national and global implications of the devastating environmental degradation of the past hundred years. When he first brought out the Wampum Belts at the Constitutional Debates in 1987, Elder Commanda drew attention to precisely this issue. Now the public at large is beginning to learn from the Indigenous voices.
- UN Reports and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights Indigenous Peoples regularly takes Canada to task on the global stage on a range of issues of concern to First Peoples: Missing and Murdered Women, Education, Justice, Human Rights, First Nations Children, Poverty, Land Issues etc.

Again, I reiterate, can we not find better ways of moving forward together? There is much the corporate world can contribute to develop and advance a true legacy into the future – and much it can do to entrench such a new way on the global stage. Benefits will accrue to all in such an approach.

## SECTION THREE – THE LEGACY VISION FOR THE SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE

### 1. Mandate

Inspired by the ancient sacred Indigenous Wampum Belts, the mandate for the **Asinabka National Indigenous Centre** is multi-fold:

- To inspire respectful and responsible choice for sustainable relationships guided by values of sharing, balance and harmonious co-existence, at these times of global crisis anticipated by the ancient *Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt*;
- To renew and celebrate the Indigenous spirit of welcome and sharing as inscribed in the *Three Figure Wampum Belt* from the 1700s;
- To celebrate freedom and interconnection consistent with the spiritual laws of nature and the great circle of life; and
- To honour First Peoples whose values and heritage have contributed substantially and positively to the evolution of Canada since its inception, and who still serve as the glue to hold a diverse society together.

### 2. The Core Vision (first presented in 2003)

- Asinabka International Indigenous Centre, hosted by the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed, led by First Nations, Inuit and Metis, and including Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and beyond
  - healing
  - heritage
  - spiritual
  - cultural
- Peace Building Conference Centre and “Tipi” Hotel
  - reconciliation
  - cultural exchange/training
  - peace and eco think tank
  - national and global meeting space
- Undammed Chaudière Falls and Central Eco City Park on Chaudière Island
  - honour and celebrate nature
  - sanctuary for individuals and communities
  - bridging multiple cultural divides
  - repatriating Indigenous plants and biodiversity
  - protecting water life and the American Eel, *Manoshkadosh*
- Historical Park
  - showcase for ancient Indigenous heritage and records
  - showcase for recent collective history and development

### 3. Critical Imperatives

For Grandfather William Commanda, the Legacy Vision is predicated on two critical issues of ever escalating global, national and local importance:

- Respect and reverence for Mother Earth, the penultimate mother
- Peace building, racial harmony and social justice and inclusion

These are integrated as one in the ancient prayer always on his lips:

#### *Ginawaydaganuc*

*We are all connected; we are all interrelated*

*With each other, Mother Earth and all her Children and with our Cosmic World*

*We have to find the path to unity*

*Our Separations and Divisions are Costing More than we can Sustain*

*More than Mother Earth can Endure without Reaction*

(And more than the insurance companies will cover in the face of escalating climate change and environmental depletion)

We are in a deep need for a new vision to shine the light into an ever more challenging global future.

With his century of self-driven effort, William Commanda charted a path for global alliances, partnerships, creativity and co-creation grounded in the ancient laws for co-existence and in the intelligence of nature. He animated this in his *Circle of All Nations* work, and numerous acknowledgements and honours indicate the span of his influence. His vision continues to inspire an incredibly diverse community, from grass roots to politicians, spiritual leaders to academics.

Thus, the Mission is to vitalize and celebrate a strong, unified Indigenous presence in the sacred heart of the country, inspiring a passion for environmental stewardship and peace-building, consistent with the deep understanding of the central ancestral prayer of the land: *Ginawaydaganuc, We Are All Connected*, thereby ensuring a sustainable future for the *Seven Generations*.

### 4. Expected Key Results

1. Sharing and strengthening strategies for healing and social development programs;
2. Creation of an environment conducive to healing of relationships amongst First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples, both on reserves and in urban and rural areas; and with the Settler community;
3. Creation of space for art studios and creative activities;
4. Creation of space for the showcasing of art and culture of First Nations, Inuit and Metis;

5. Increased visibility of Indigenous Peoples in the National Capital Region and country;
6. Establishment of archives, and creation of an environment and resource base to support researchers and students in universities and colleges in the national capital region and beyond;
7. Incremental improvements in the socio/economic/health conditions of Indigenous Peoples, consistent with the ideals of the *Three Figure Wampum Belt* and principles of sharing and confederacy, in fair recognition of birth rights to land and resources;
8. Comprehensive articulation of Indigenous thoughts on global, environmental and social justice issues;
9. Greater understanding of Indigenous ideology and its tremendous importance to the key issues of the times – health, environmental stewardship and peace-building;
10. Understanding and affirmation of Indigenous history and rights amongst Canadians at large; and commitment to support their occupation of their rightful position as First Peoples of this land;
11. Celebration of Indigenous culture and heritage as *The Sacred Jewel in the Nation's Crown*;
12. Maturation and self-respect in the Canadian psyche.

## **SECTION FOUR – AN INVITATION TO DREAM BIG TO SAFE GUARD AND ANIMATE THE LIVING LEGACY OF WILLIAM COMMANDA**

### **Blueprint for the future: William Commanda’s Legacy Vision for Asinabka in a Nutshell**

The bold, fully inclusive, four-fold legacy vision, presented upon his receipt of the Key to the City in 2006, calls for

1. Building an Indigenous Centre
2. Building a Peace Building Meeting Site
3. Creating a City Park and Historical Interpretive Centre, and
4. Freeing the Chaudière Falls

It has captured the imagination of countless peoples from across the globe over the past decade.

Its manifestation on the sacred site of unparalleled ancient and historical significance, as envisioned in sublime and incomparable conceptual designs embraced by the by world renowned Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal, presents a unique and exemplary opportunity to *Correct the Mistakes of History and Look to the Future*.

In essence, it presents the road map for advancing reconciliation with First Peoples, Mother Earth and all others – all are winners in this global blue print. Its core objective is to advance healing at three fundamental levels:

Healing individual and collective relationships with Mother Earth;  
Healing, strengthening and unifying Indigenous Peoples; and  
Healing relationships with all others.

### **Recommendation**

I strongly *exhort* that the Sacred Chaudière Site be developed fully consistent with the vision of the rightful heir of the place, late Algonquin Elder Dr. William Commanda, OC, Carrier of the Sacred Wampum Belt Heritage, as developed with the Algonquin Peoples on both the Ontario and Quebec sides of the Ottawa River, with Indigenous Peoples from across the country and beyond, and with countless Non Indigenous Peoples from Canada and beyond, and as recommended and supported by the National Capital Commission, and also formally endorsed by the City of Ottawa in 2010.

I further *exhort* that the entire site be safeguarded from privatization and development until such time as the Indigenous Peoples and allies in support of Grandfather Commanda



surmount historical barriers and jointly take their place to advance a vision for reconciliation, peace building, sharing, public space and respect for Mother Earth, consistent with the Legacy Vision of William Commanda, whose direct ancestors prayed to safeguard the Sacred Chaudière Falls at the time of the first European developer.

Grandfather Commanda presented the sacred blueprint and legacy for reconciliation and healing and for: *vision not a mere plan, the golden goose, and not gold; public and not privatized space*. Countless people are grateful for his tireless efforts to awaken us to the true blessings of his land. At this time too, I am reminded of an Indigenous prophecy that he repeatedly shared with us:

*Only after the last tree has been cut down,  
Only after the last river has been poisoned,  
Only after the last fish has been caught,  
Only then will you find that your money cannot be eaten.*

Now seventeen years after I first heard it, it only resonates more profoundly.

Let us rise to the challenge together and make his dream a Canadian reality – then we shall all have something to celebrate and share with the world in 2017 – a new and revitalized Canada, strengthened from the Source. And, it is indeed a dream for a *sustainable reality*.

Megwetch,

***Ginawadaganuc***

We are all connected

**Romola V. Thumbadoo**

**Coordinator**

**Circle of All Nations**

**Founder, William Commanda**

#### **KEY LINKS**

[www.asinabka.com](http://www.asinabka.com)

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