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October 29, 2010

Justin Trudeau, MP  
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6  
Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Congratulations on your new appointment as Prime Minister of Canada. I was among the millions who cast their vote behind you. I am immensely pleased, and looking forward to "real change!" I remember your father's era well, and I pray you will make him very proud.

Your father's friend, the late Algonquin Chief William Commanda's vision for [ASINABKA](#) desperately needs your immediate attention. Chaudière Island, a sacred site of global significance, is currently being blasted with dynamite by Hydro Ottawa in blatant disregard of the elder's vision. Only you have the power to put a stop to it immediately. This is an environmental, cultural, human rights, ethical and moral matter which must be addressed RIGHT NOW before further damage is done.

In addition, Windmill Developments has put out an advertisement to sell the land on the sacred islands to prospective condo owners, even though the Algonquin people are contesting title and Windmill has not yet received approval of the zoning requirements.

Windmill and Hydro Ottawa are blatantly disregarding the rights of Indigenous people, and are carelessly bulldozing, literally and figuratively, through something much greater and more precious and serious than these mindless children have any clue about.

For all the promises made to honour Indigenous rights and right past wrongs, the request to have these sacred lands returned ***must properly examined and honoured before another pebble on that land is touched!!***

William Commanda, globally renowned Spiritual Leader, Chief of the Algonquin nation for over 40 years, Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government initiative launched by Jules Sioux in the 1940s, carrier of three sacred wampum belts of historical significance, including the legendary ***Seven Fires Prophecy Belt***, the ***Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt***, and the ***1700's Welcoming Belt***, called for the restoration of this very special sacred site.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes and affirms the rights of indigenous peoples to their cultural, religious, and spiritual practices, to have private access to sacred sites (Arts. 12(1), 11(1)), as well as to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with their traditionally held lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources (Art. 25).

With this declaration, the rest of the world has stated its support and created a legal stand for Asinabka. It's up to you, Prime Minister, to see that your First Peoples are honoured by also showing your strongest and immediate support for this stand.

**I refer you directly to a link to the official plans that William submitted to the City of Ottawa in February 2010: [2010-02-14 CAN Report on the Vision for Asinabka](#)** so you can read for yourself, in his very own words, what the geographical site actually encompassed, and what the elder had in mind for restoring the site.

**Please note that these plans were decades in the making by the elder and the Algonquin communities of Quebec and Ontario, who were ALL in full agreement with this plan, and as far as William was aware, remained so up until his dying day. Most of them are still in agreement, with the exception of a few who sadly sold out to the pressures and promises of Windmill Development - an unfortunate and curious situation that many strongly believe bears closer investigation.**

Fortunately, the majority of Algonquins are still in support of William's vision, despite what Windmill would have everyone believe, and a growing number of First Nations communities, Aboriginal groups and supporters across Canada and around the globe are standing up to show their respect and support for William's vision.

Let's be clear, this is not just an Algonquin issue, it is a global Indigenous issue. Grandfather William said that this site has been a magnet for Indigenous people across the continent and around the globe for many thousands of years. He openly shared his people's understanding of [Asinabka](#) as a very ancient sacred site, and its importance in relation to the whole of Turtle Island.

Is it really possible that one place could have such a great impact on such a large body of land? Those who have been following the saga of the [eels](#) and other migratory creatures believe so. Grandfather William understood the significance of his vision, its impact on the environment, and its potential effects for rippling out around the globe. He spoke passionately about the cleansing ability of rivers as the lifeblood of the planet. He warned us about dams and how they clog up the system the same way that cholesterol clogs up the human arteries. He talked, walked, and breathed environmental sustainability. He also understood that his people, weakened and divided by centuries of oppression and genocide, needed their place of power returned to them in order to heal, unite, reconcile, and become strong. He prayed hard for the people to *come together with one heart, one mind, one purpose, to become a Circle of All Nations, and Culture of Peace.*

*Dear Prime Minister,* to allow anything other than this to happen, when you hold the power in your hands to affect "real change", is to commit yet another felony against the Indigenous people of this land. My heart tells me that you are a much better man than that.

I am a Métis woman, writing as someone who worked closely with this very special elder during the last 15 years of his life. Amongst other thing, I set up and continue to maintain the elder's website [www.Asinabka.com](http://www.Asinabka.com). I can attest to the fact that up until his death, all the information on that site was written or fully approved by William Commanda. Since his passing, all content has been contributed or approved by his well known long-time companion and assistant Romola Thumbadoo.

In an effort to help dispel any possible misunderstandings about the site, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some issues based on what I personally witnessed during my time with Grandfather William.

In 2002-2003, Victoria Island was the only area on the sacred site known as Asinabka that was actually accessible to William and his people. Consequently, in reports dated during that time period, the sacred site was often referred to as "Victoria Island", since this was the familiar frame of reference for the site. After more careful consideration, the use of the term "Victoria Island" was deliberately set aside, since it was in fact the chain of islands surrounding the Chaudière Falls site which was considered sacred, especially Chaudière Island itself, since it is the only island with an actual view of the falls.

**I was among those sitting in the room with Grandfather William sometime during 2005-2006, (unfortunately, I can't recall the specific date, though the year is evidenced by subsequent events and reports) at the historic moment when Grandfather was asked by someone what the site would have been commonly called by Algonquin people in their own tongue. Grandfather replied "Asinabka", and explained it's meaning "place of glare rock", at "Asticou" or Akikipautik, the boiling kettle or sacred pipe of the Chaudière Falls. It was at this moment that it was decided by the group that we should henceforth use the term *Asinabka* when referring to the sacred site.**

Shortly afterwards, it might well have been on that very day, I volunteered to set up the Asinabka website for Grandfather William. It was an obvious progression for the vision, and one that I was able and eager to contribute to. Grandfather and Romola both gave me very specific instructions on every detail of the website design, and provided me with all the reports they wanted to make available. We spent a great deal of time together ensuring that the information met their exact specifications. I can attest to the integrity of the information and that fact that there has not been a single thing added to the website without their explicit instruction and approval. The site as a vehicle, by all intent and purposes, is the property of Grandfather William and, by default, his companion Romola. I am and have always been, merely the chauffeur.

During this time period, I learned a great deal from the elder about this very special sacred site. Recorded in history books as being second only to Niagara Falls in its power and glory, the once magnificent Chaudière falls have a deep history that stretches far back, long before the industrial era. Noted for its power, massive size, unique bowl shape and permanent rainbow bubble over frothing, steaming waters, it is hardly surprising that the falls were a magnet and considered to be sacred by the ancestors who walked the land. This sacred site also exists at the convergence of three major rivers that form the cross of a medicine wheel - a fact that is also very significant to Indigenous people.

Samuel de Champlain, the "Father" of New France (Quebec), was one of several who witnessed and documented Indigenous people performing ceremony at the Chaudière Falls site. Grandfather William firmly believed it to be one of the most important sacred sites of North America, and extremely significant to the First Nations people of this continent. The Elder claimed that almost every Indigenous tribe in North America has had some historical knowledge of this very special place, and came there to gather for ceremony, sharing and exchange of goods and ideas. It's not hard to imagine that the second largest water falls on the continent would attract this kind of attention, especially considering its unique features.

As you know, over the past two centuries the Chaudière Falls became a victim of corporate greed and industrial exploitation. The Indigenous people were shoved aside and frightened away, in fear for their lives. The falls were dammed in 1910, and access to the area was eventually completely blocked to the public, both physically and consequently visually.

Despite the desecration of their sacred site, and centuries of oppression and fear, the First Peoples never forgot or gave up on this place. While their land was being stolen in the 1600 and 1700's, the history books tell time and again of how the local chiefs sent petition after petition to the crown for the return of their land, but were repeatedly ignored.

Over the last several decades, as the risk of murder, rape, starvation and other atrocities against Aboriginal people subsided, the People began slowly making their way back to their sacred site, only to be met with barriers of locks and chains. Chaudière island was completely inaccessible and remained so until Domtar recently closed its facilities on the island. Prior to that, the closest the People could get to the severely damaged falls was the eastern vacant portion of Victoria Island, located east of Chaudière Island. This is the how and why Victoria Island came to be the current gathering place and target location for the as-yet-to-be-built Indigenous Centre. The People simply adapted to their situation as best they could. The sacred site's focal point, Chaudière Island, meanwhile appeared to be out of sight and out of mind, but not to Elder William Commanda and his people.

Grandfather often reminded us that his people never gave up on these islands. Today, they are still considered to be unceded Algonquin territory, despite furious efforts by outsiders to make it otherwise. In this day and age, after all that has been done to them, and the thousands and thousands of miles of land that have been stolen, with all the promises of truth and reconciliation, the Indigenous people of this land have stood up to ask for these tiny islands to be returned to them so that they may heal and be healed by their sacred site. Please don't let this voice be ignored.

William Commanda, the tireless 98 year old elder, who was almost as old as the ring dam around the falls, and whose direct ancestors had historical ties to the Chaudière Falls site, worked for decades to raise awareness of and develop a plan to restore their sacred site. For those who took the time to really listen and understand his vision, Grandfather William left an astounding legacy, with a clear message about what needed to be done.

WILLIAM DID NOT SAY, "Go ahead and build a bunch of condos and shops on the island that is at the very core of our sacred site. Blast the Grandfathers (rocks) to smithereens so you can toss in some more hydro electric equipment to add to the burden on this very special river, and then rip up some more of the blood and bones of my ancestors in order to put in some underground parking for good measure."

As each stick of dynamite blows another hole in this site, we hear the screams of our Ancestors, and feel our Mother Earth dying just a little bit more.

William Commanda very clearly called for the REMOVAL OF THE CHAUDIÈRE DAM, which is in direct opposition to what is currently happening down on Chaudière Island right now. I beg you, Prime Minister, to please call a halt to the blasting and desecration currently being committed by Hydro Ottawa. Our future depends on it! We ask you, Prime Minister, to please stand up with us.

Were all the Indigenous people of this country given the right to vote on this issue, I have no doubt we would see the same kind of landslide victory for William's vision as we saw for your own. Please help provide Aboriginal people in the rest of Canada the voice to do so. Don't wait until it's too late! Hydro Ottawa and Windmill MUST BE STOPPED IMMEDIATELY!!

William was often heard quoting the following Native prophecy:

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 money cannot be eaten.

William was a highly intelligent man. He knew that Rome wasn't built in a day and that it would take a long time before the dam was fully removed and the river and land restored. He understood the implications on the watershed and surrounding land. He also knew, in the same way that the City planners of bygone eras knew and, yes, planned all along, that it is indeed both possible and ultimately very desirable to have the dam removed. All he wanted was for us to make a start in that direction.

The fact that continued desecration is occurring on the very island at the heart of this sacred site is beyond comprehension. Something must be done to stop it! Regardless of who thinks they currently hold title, the land was supposed to have been held in trust for the Indigenous People, and they have stood up and repeatedly asked for this island in particular to be returned to them. ***This request must properly examined and honoured!!!***

In 2007, Domtar announced that they were retiring one of the 100 year old hydro turbines at the Chaudière dam and were going to replace it with a new one. Grandfather William stepped in and begged them not to replace it. He explained that this was the first step in a process that would take a long time to bear fruit. I was among the small handful of people who attended the meeting at City Hall with Domtar on behalf of William and Romola. We considered it a victory that we managed to delay their project for two years. But in the end, the turbine was replaced.

William Commanda called for the REFORESTATION OF CHAUDIÈRE ISLAND. This vision is also in direct conflict with the plans for Windmill Development. I beg you to also put a stop to those plans as well. William believed the island was sacred and should be turned into green space for the sake of all, for the health of the, for everyone to share, as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation with Mother Earth and each other. In this way, he believed the site would once again be restored as the sacred gathering place of his ancestors. He believed the site belonged to everyone on Turtle Island, and that we all had a responsibility to it.

Grandfather William [formally presented his vision to the City of Ottawa in February of 2010](#), **which was distinctly inclusive of Chaudière Island**. A form of approval came from the City [in November of the same year](#), stating "**that Council support a National Indigenous Centre in the Nation's Capital, and to encourage the Federal Government to work with stakeholders (First Nations, Province of Ontario, etc.) to establish a National Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island.**" No mention was made that Chaudière Island, the very focal point and purpose of William's vision, would be excluded.

It was around this time that the 98 year-old elder's health began to fail. [He passed away a few months later in August 2011](#) at his home in Maniwaki, three days before his annual spiritual gathering, and surrounded by **thousands** of supporters who were already coming in to attend the gathering.

A year later, while the Algonquin community and thousands of friends still mourned the loss of its extraordinary leader, Hydro Ottawa announced plans to expand its hydro facilities at the Chaudière Falls dam, and Domtar announced that it was selling its privately owned portions of Chaudière Island to [Windmill Developers](#), who scrambled to gain a foothold on the valuable site and develop support for its own plans to build private condominiums and retail stores. No mention or consideration was made of

William Commanda's formal request that the island be returned to the People as part of his vision for Asinabka.

Despite heated protests, Ottawa Hydro and Windmill have blindly and forcefully marched forward in their grim determination to claim this land for their own. Sadly, the storm that has been created in the wake of the Hydro/Windmill announcements appears to be further fragmenting an already weak and fragmented Algonquin community. Some have buckled under financial duress and pressure to give up their unceded land. The weak are unprotected and vulnerable against these wolves. There are growing concerns about fraud, racketeering and corruption surrounding the development.

So now this comes down to you, dear Prime Minister. Please think carefully on this. This site has the potential to become a massive global symbol of reconciliation, with Mother Earth and the Indigenous people of this land. And you, Prime Minister, have the opportunity to make that a part of your legacy.

Before I conclude this letter, I would like to share with you a little information about the sacred wampum belts that Grandfather William carried for the People. I pray that you will grasp the significance of these powerful symbols in the hands of a holy man who called for the recognition and restoration of this sacred site.

### **Algonquin Elder William Commanda, carrier of three Sacred Wampum Belts:**

In 1970, Elder William Commanda became Keeper of three sacred wampum belts of historical and spiritual importance. These belts, together with another one which disappeared many decades ago, were held by his great-great-grandfather, Pakinawatik, and they carry testimony of significant prophecies, agreements and understandings which have guided the Anishnabeg peoples for centuries. The belts inspired the Elder's work over many decades. In 1987, he began sharing the messages of the Wampum Belts publicly during the constitutional debates, and continued to do so with increasing urgency until his passing in 2011.



Algonquin Elder William Commanda (1913-11-11 to 2011-08-03) with the Seven Fires Prophecy Belt

The core messages of the three Wampum Belts are:

### **The Seven Fires Prophecy Belt**

This ancient sacred belt dates back to the late 1400s at the time of the unfolding of its final message, the message of CHOICE about our relationships with each other and with all creations of Mother Earth. Grandfather William asked, "Will we be guided by values of sharing, balance and harmonious co-existence?"

The Seven Fires Prophecy is an ancient Anishnabeg prophecy marking epochs in the life of Indigenous people on Turtle Island. Many Anishnabeg Elders alive today believe that we are in the time of the Seventh Fire, a time of great Earth changes. According to the prophecy, *during this time the light skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal fire of peace, love brotherhood and sisterhood, and they will have the chance to create the greatest spiritual nation ever to have existed. But if they continue down the road of materialism, it will be their destruction and for all humanity as well.*

Many are saying that Asinabka (the Chaudière Falls sacred site) is one of the prophesized "crossroads awaiting our decision".



### The 1700's Welcoming Belt

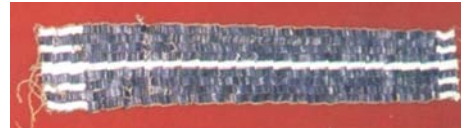
The 1700's Welcoming Belt depicts three figures, representing the English on one side, the French on the other, and the Aboriginal people in the middle. It is both significant and poignant to note that the sacred Aboriginal site at the heart of William's vision is geographically located in between Ontario, which is predominantly English, and Quebec, which is predominantly French.

On December 31, 1857, Queen Victoria chose Ottawa to be the common capital for the Province of Canada (modern Quebec and Ontario). Ottawa was the only settlement of any significant size located right on the border of Canada East and Canada West (Upper and Lower Canada), making it a compromise between the French and English populations.

As he described it in his book "*Learning from a Kindergarten Dropout*", the 1700's Welcoming belt "is about equitable SHARING" for all Canadians. This belt has also become symbolic of the Elder's vision for Asinabka.

### The Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt

The "Jay Treaty" is an agreement signed by the United States and Great Britain in 1794 to allow Canadian born Native Americans to travel freely across the U.S./Canadian border.



The Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt underscores the fundamental spiritual message of indigenous peoples about BORDERLESSNESS: the Elder's people, the Mamuwini, the nomads, belong to North America, and as such they retain a sacred connection and responsibility to the land they are born to. As Elder Commanda puts it, "My territory is as the river flows, as the bird flies and as the wind blows."

*Three ancient, legendary wampum belts, each carrying potent and very applicable messages for this period in time, were in the hands of a holy man who called for the restoration of a special sacred site as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation with Mother Earth to heal the environment and humanity.*

Prime Minister, please take immediate action. Every moment is critical in this situation.

Chi miigwetch! Thank you! Marci!

**Karen Bisson**