

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS MESSAGE FROM FAMILY, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE WORK OF ALGONQUIN ELDER, WILLIAM COMMANDA

Please engage actively in discussion and advancement of the fully inclusive peace-building legacy vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site within the heart of Algonquin territory, in the National Capital Region, as articulated by late Indigenous Elder, Dr. William Commanda, OC, founder, *Circle of All Nations*. (www.asinabka.com; www.circleofallnations.ca)

ISSUE

The Sacred Chaudière Site, which lies within the heart of Canada's capital city capital, was inscribed with a vision for **shared public space** by Late Algonquin Elder William Commanda, ([Asinabka Brochure](#)). Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal has developed conceptual designs for this site ([Douglas Cardinal Chaudière Site Plan.jpg](#)).

It was Elder Commanda's belief that, consistent with its ancient significance as a gathering place of singular importance to his ancestors, this special place of incomparable sacred, heritage, historical and peace-building importance and power in Canada, offers a fresh opportunity for reconciliation, cooperation and joint efforts to *correct mistakes of the past* at multiple levels, and to ignite a true legacy for environmental stewardship and peace-building for the global family, in these times of global uncertainty.

The *Circle of All Nations* and colleagues believe it is of urgent and critical importance that his all-inclusive and far-reaching Indigenous vision for a National Historical Centre at the Chaudière Site be respected, endorsed and advanced at multiple levels of leadership – in essence, it comprises an Indigenous centre, historical interpretive site, peace and eco conference centre think tank, hotel, eco-city park, and a freed Chaudière Falls, and as such, is not without implications for significant employment and revenue generation in the capital city in the context of tourism and training/development in this federal government city centre.

EXHORTATION

We call for urgent and widespread consideration and sharing of this fully inclusive William Commanda Legacy Vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site and urge you to send your message to the Prime Minister, your MPs and others, and *Circle of All Nations* accordingly (pm@pmo.gc.ca and circleofallnations@sympatico.ca) - Help us make this a national project!

Further we exhort the federal government to seize responsibility for the heart of the National Capital Region and establish of a multi-disciplinary task force to develop the implementation plan for the Sacred Chaudière Site. Such a project will constitute the true legacy project to reorient Canada to embrace its potential for celebrating hope, inclusion and integration for its 150th birthday in a fragile and increasingly challenged global reality.

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BACKGROUNDER

- William Commanda, the highly respected Algonquin Elder of the Ottawa River Watershed, the Carrier of Wampum Belts of sacred and historical importance, worked nationally and internationally, including at the United Nations, over many decades to advance environmental stewardship, Indigenous voice, social justice, racial harmony and peace-building ([Mini Bio GWC](#)); these are the critical issues of our times;
- The core messages of Wampum Belts are as follows: the most ancient belt, the *Seven Fires Prophecy Belt*, warns the people of the coming of changes into their lives, of times of environment struggle and of strife, and of the need for choice making to ensure a sustainable future for future generations; the *Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Belt* from 1700 affirms the commitment of the Indian in the centre to share his grand natural resources and his values with the newcomers, then the French and English, in equal shares, the fact that it was a sacred agreement being acknowledged by the sign of the Vatican; and the *Border Crossing Belt* indeed affirms the spirit of borderlessness – and shared space. The messages of these ancient relics of the land are interwoven in the vision for Indigenous presence in the sacred heart of the country, in the Indigenous Centre; in a peace-building venue; honouring the ancient, historical and contemporary realities of Canada; a “tipi” hotel gathering place; a “central park” sanctuary for all, expressive of respect for nature, trees and water; and a Chaudière Falls freed to the fullest extent possible;
- Commencing in 1998, he developed a *Legacy Vision* for the Sacred Chaudière Site (see [OPEN LETTER AVI June 2014 final.pdf](#)), in consultation with Algonquin communities, and thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Peoples, nationally and internationally, and he promoted it to all federal parties and others over many years; the City of Ottawa formally endorsed the vision in 2010;
- The *Heritage Site* implications and potential are discussed at length in the attached note [Asinabka Heritage Note 23 Sept 2014 pdf.pdf](#)
- William Commanda died in August 2011;
- He appealed to three prime ministers to establish a joint task force to animate this vision – he knew that he, a ninety year old man, could not execute this huge vision and work alone;
- The Sacred Chaudière Site is now vulnerable to other development interests, contrary to his vision for shared public space in his ancestral lands within the heart of the National Capital Region;
- It is critically important for government to engage in urgent consideration of this file;
- All key documents on this work (as well as 2014 notes on William Commanda’s related work on water and peace issues) are presented chronologically in the website www.asinabka.com.

KEY LAND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- The Chaudière group of islands and the Falls upon which their significance are predicated, are of critical importance to Indigenous Peoples from across the continent; a meeting place from time immemorial, they are located where the Gatineau and Rideau Rivers from north and south meet the Ottawa flowing west to east, centred on the spectacular circular falls; William Commanda, *the* direct

descendent of the people who were guardians of the site at the time of the earliest historical settlement and before, believed that it was no accident that this special area became the location of the capital city of Canada:

- The site was acknowledged as a sacred place to the Native Peoples by Brule and Champlain in the 1600s;
 - Descendants of William Commanda's ancestral Grandmother Commandant of Commandant Lake, (now Papineau) asserted territorial rights and responsibilities at the actual Sacred Chaudière Site to first non-indigenous settler, Philoman Wright, (noted in transcription of his notes by his daughter), in what remains unsundered, unceded and unconquered Algonquin Territory to this day. Note that this ancestor was alive in 1760, before the time of the Royal Proclamation of 1763; and earliest records acknowledge the presence of the people of the Kinogé, the river at Commandant Lake, at the Chaudière;
 - This special place was *shared* with Queen Victoria, on the eve of Confederation, and destined to become the capital city; note that it was William Commanda's great, great grandfather Chief Luc-Antoine Pakinawatik who welcomed Prince Albert Edward here in 1860 – the Prince himself set the cornerstone of the parliament buildings in Ottawa on behalf of Queen Victoria;
 - With the arrival of newcomers to the area in 1800s, the exploitation of its resources, and the decimation of the Algonquin Peoples by disease, attack and war, their presence at this central meeting place diminished; but over the past 40 years, Indigenous Peoples from various parts of the country have returned to the area. William Commanda animated this place personally in the 80s, and intensively in the 90s and 2000s. As a result, it is alive in the minds of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, and countless peoples have participated in his ceremonies at this place;
 - The continuing hold of this place on Indigenous Peoples has been evidenced in activism and presence here over the past three years, where even the National News has noted this place by its old name, *Asinabka*;
- In a remarkable merging of time, its importance as a singular heritage site is reaffirmed with the 2014 uncovering finding of artifacts (not bones) on the Ottawa River; these date back to the post ice age period, 2,500 and 6,000 years ago, and are indicative of travel from locations as distant as Lake Superior, Lake Ontario, and New York State, to the *Medicine Wheel* centre of the Chaudière Falls, and performance of specific group activities;
 - Chaudière and Albert islands, closest to the falls and critical to the integrity of the sacred landscape, are now vulnerable to privatization:
 - developers originally acquired “lease in perpetuity” control here in 1854;
 - this is precisely the time when William Commanda's great great grandfather Pakinawatik negotiated the first reserves straddling the Ottawa River: River Desert, now Kitigan Zibi Ashinabeg, Pikwakanagan/Golden Lake, and Temiscaming; note that this was negotiated under the Royal Proclamation of

1763, before there was a Canada, Ontario or Quebec; and, consistent with the 1700s Wampum Belt, Pakinawatik asserted *sharing* of lands, resources and values with the newcomers;

- Controversial land claims, negotiations and conflicts impact contemporary land issues at the Sacred Chaudière Site, and in the absence of a consolidated Algonquin voice (the direct result of historical colonial divisions, including provincial boundaries that split the sacred heart of the traditional territory of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed), corporate entities are advancing accelerated efforts to rezone and privatize a sacred site of tremendous national and international significance already designated for public sharing, Indigenous presence, and peace building;
- William Commanda's daughter, Evelyn Commanda Dewache, his niece Mary Daisy Commanda Jacko (with direct connections to the 1700s Grandmother Commandant of Commandant Lake, and the Wampum Belt heritage and this particular piece of land), and I, Romola V. Thumbadoo, William Commanda's biographer and coordinator of his *Circle of All Nations* and *Asinabka* work, and countless others exhort the federal government to halt the plans to desecrate an ancient heritage site at a spectacular waterfall with yet another condominium development project and privatization.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

- William Commanda developed his visionary ideas in the context of historical and present day issues of local and global significance, and he animated these in his *Circle of All Nations* work; (www.circleofallnations.ca)
- He identified environmental crisis, Indigenous voice, social justice and racial harmony as the critical issues of our times, and single-handedly did what he could about it, with his diverse and informal *Circle of All Nations* community;
- Consistent with the *Sacred Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt of 1700* he reaffirmed the place, voice and vision of the First Peoples in the centre of this country, at the Sacred Chaudière Site;
- Today, crises are accelerating at unprecedented levels on environmental and peace fronts;
- In Canada, crises on First Nations files are dominating the national and international headlines, and no resolution on this foundational Canadian issue is emerging in the hostile dialogue; electronic communications is acerbating rancor;
- Blood and death has entered the Peace Tower and Parliament and marked the place irrevocably;
- Canada, evolved of diversity and critically dependent on transforming the history of racism seeded with its inception, is imploding visibly, and the divisions are no longer the romanticized Two Solitudes; racism is increasingly apparent in all parts of the country; it is reaching crisis proportions in the United States – the other half of William Commanda's *Turtle Island*;
- Mental health issues are immobilizing and constraining us publicly at multiple levels: from the armed forces, federal public service, police services, sports world, prisons, public school levels, immigrant communities to citizenry at large accessing medical systems ill equipped to cope with the burgeoning crisis;

- The window is now opening to widespread national preoccupation with sexual abuse and harassment – note that First Peoples raised the curtain on sexual abuse, and the recent public meetings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the call for an Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women expose shameful historical and contemporary realities; these issues are now also a visible part of the country's government and public psyche;
- Climate change and its multiple costs are growing at unprecedented levels nationally and globally; environmental abuses and the local, regional and global implications of the widespread devastation to biodiversity and life are no longer hidden in remote areas – the information world is changing this. Here too, Indigenous Peoples, are leading the charge for environmental stewardship. Now, the world's most senior diplomat, the Secretary General of the United Nations, is urging Canada to think, act and lead on environmental challenges of global relevance – in a manner William Commanda demanded publicly in the 1987 Constitutional Debates, and affirmed in the Pre-Rio Earth Summit Conference of 1990. (Note: The Commanda Legacy Vision has already been registered at the United Nations [UN/FANCV Asinabka Outreach](#));
- Electronic communications are awakening and strengthening public engagement on all these issues and are presenting new challenges for governance and management;
- Canada, *home* now of the vast diversity of peoples of the world, and dependent as it has been since its inception on resource exploitation, has the greatest of challenges to address on the global stage;
- The First Peoples have a critical role to play in this country's evolution and this reality cannot be extinguished – increasingly strategies of colonial dominance will be challenged in courts and elsewhere; we are in critical need of reconciliation with First Peoples;
- Note that *Crown Land*, like Chaudière, Amelia and Victoria Islands, were originally leased to permit the development of the country
 - it is becoming increasingly clear to many that Canada was developed as an imperial and colonizing corporate project for resource exploitation, (with terms like *fee simple* and *moulin banal* revealing European serf heritage);
 - its democracy is not grounded on sound geo-political footings; as such we are destroying not honouring life, and seriously jeopardizing the future of our children;
 - as such, William Commanda's insistence on the recognition of Earth as a living entity, with the ultimately indomitable *Law of Nature*, with specific guidance for humans as part of her ecological framework, and his public exhortation responsibility and respect resounds with many;
 - William Commanda offers a powerful Indigenous vision for a new phase in Canada's evolution; it is to be animated at this central site;
 - We are at a critical crossroads where we can choose to spiral down further along outmoded colonial pathways, with continued disrespect and negation of the Indigenous exhortation, or shift direction and work together to create a legacy of reconciliation and healing inclusive of all and future generations at the Sacred Chaudière Site.