



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE

CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS

A Message Regarding Development at South March Highlands

January 6, 2011

William Commanda



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A Message from William Commanda regarding the Proposed Development in South March Highlands

Your Worship the Mayor and City Councillors,
City of Ottawa

Re: Proposed Development in South March Highlands

Greetings for the New Year.

I write again with respect to the campaign to save the South March Highlands site. This holiday season has been afire with the passion of many community voices determined to protect this unique area.

I together with many others again urge City Council to initiate an immediate and comprehensive archaeological survey of this site; I believe it is the underlying responsibility of the crown and governments and the National Capital Commission to safeguard this ecologically and archaeologically unique site of the South March Highlands as a potential national heritage site, one of significant Indigenous importance, and as an Algonquin in the unceded, unconquered and unsundered Ottawa River Watershed, I add my voice to the call for such action.

I also add, as spiritual elder, that beyond its archaeological history, this is a living temple, a place of *Manitou*, a special place of nature, and that precious reality also demands immediate protection and reverence.

I, like many others, am deeply concerned with the devastation of yet another precious bio-diverse eco-space; the ancient history and records of the land itself, and the signature and knowledge of its original inhabitants of 10,000 years ago, yet to be uncovered and comprehended, add to the potential irreplaceable loss. It is no insignificant heritage that lies here – the likes of this site and heritage would be deeply valued in other homelands.

I am Algonquin of the Ottawa River Watershed, and this Kichissippi landscape is the traditional homeland of my ancestors over countless centuries; our predecessors occupied this ancient, earliest habitable, land over ten centuries ago, and this is significant in the history of Turtle Island and the globe. Our understanding of this history and heritage in the Watershed has been obliterated and distorted over the past five hundred years, but increasing numbers of people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are beginning to reach to this heritage that now binds us all to this land, and they are already finding their lives enriched.

In recent correspondence to the City's Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee, I wrote *"It is becoming increasingly apparent to most citizens that Aboriginal Peoples and our history, art and culture are largely invisible in the capital city. During this past year,*

I have had meetings with the City's Cultural Renewal team, and I am encouraged to see that some work is now underway to address this deficiency/omission."

The present challenge presents an opportunity for transforming this history.

I have written two notes on this matter in past months. I add these words to support the great community effort now underway both to protect an ancient forest and to understand the complexities of the Indigenous voice.

1. It is very encouraging to me to see communities questioning historic land acquisition and ownership practices, development, and environmental stewardship practices; I have seen in recent years the growing strength of diverse voices coming together and impacting established governance structures with considerable knowledge and expertise. I pray bridges of understanding will evolve in engaging with these voices of the future in the exercise of true leadership in our complex and evolving societies.

2. I have followed the efforts of the local community for many months, and I see the huge challenges in the cause being addressed with creativity, passion, research, information, prayer, dedication and commitment. I note the group has also made courteous outreach to the developers, and I hope this brings positive outcomes. I see the growing awareness of the need for Indigenous voice in the effort. Unfortunately, most Indigenous Peoples have been far removed physically from the energy and heritage of this place. But this does not mean that the protection and preservation of this heritage is not of crucial importance.

3. I speak for myself alone, and for my *Circle of All Nations*, a global eco-community unified by my fundamental and unshakable conviction that as children of Mother Earth, we all belong together, irrespective of our individual colour, creed or culture.

I am ninety-seven years old; in less than a month, my spirit will have been part of this land ninety nine years; that is a long, long time. I have witnessed much transformation here and across Mother Earth, and I see many, many shortcomings in our individual and collective relationship with the penultimate source of life, shortcomings that are costing us, future generations, animals and plant life more and more dearly each day. I believe Mother Earth herself must and will draw us back to *sustainable relationships* for and with all.

I have been passionately interested in my history and heritage for close to a century; this passion fired the creation of the *Circle of All Nations*, focused on advancing *Respect for Mother Earth, Indigenous Wisdom, Social Justice and Peace Building*, and we conceptualize the intermix of these priorities under the rubric of *Sustainable Relationships*. This is the essence of our ancient Indigenous prayer, *Ginawaydaganuc*, which reflects that, in the final analysis, we are all connected – with the water we drink, the air we breath, with the food, medicines and gifts the earth provides us, with the animal teachers, with the larger universe, and with each other. Modern scientists and

quantum physicists are trying to apprehend this immense reality of the circle and cycle of life. This is a medicine circle and medicine cycle that demands respect and responsibility. Thousands of people from across the world, Indigenous and non-Indigenous have participated in my annual gatherings to engage in the creation of such an understanding of and in our lives. South March Highlands is one such learning site.

4. While focused on the protection of this specific site, I see the seeds of this larger vision taking form in this South March Highlands Campaign.

By way of illustrating this point, I mention the following:

- Indigenous Peoples have expressed our concern for Mother Earth to the United Nations since the 1940s, myself amongst them; in October 2010, the *Policy Matters* book emerging from the UN Conference on Biodiversity in Japan (after which Canada and the United States signed on to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) notes (page 209, my photo included) *the struggle to practice Ginawaydaganuc, and sustain the biological diversity of (our) homeland*; that day is coming;
- In 1987, at the Constitutional Debates, as Carrier of our Sacred Wampum Belts, I reminded the then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the Premiers of their historic and collective failure to protect the environment, consistent with the *Three Figure Welcoming Wampum Belt* heritage of the land, and issued an urgent warning and appeal for sustainable stewardship;
- In 1996, with the release of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, I drew attention to the polluted Ottawa River waters, noting that the survival of Indigenous Peoples and the environment were in fact one and the same thing, something that others not genuinely “*at home*” here need to understand, in order create a respectful relationship with Mother Earth; in the end, the pollution impacts all our lives;
- I served as spiritual guide for the 1995/96 Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth, a walk from First Encounter Beach, Cape Cod to Santa Barbara, California, to bring Indigenous prayer back to land despoiled by bloodshed, expropriation and exploitation;
- On my *Circle of All Nations* brochure, I note that endless stream of logging trucks through my homeland feels “like a needle in my eye”;
- and it is only since my Waterlife Workshop of 2006 that the capital city and now Gatineau have awakened to the gravity of the pollution of the Ottawa River.

I mention these few things to show that my concern for the South March Highlands is consistent with a much larger and longer commitment to the environment and Mother Earth. Further, I have been engaged here in Kanata regularly over the past dozen years, have conducted countless ceremonies here with people from all over the world; and I photographed the four-trunked tree in my *Circle of All Nations* logo myself, here in Kanata. Hence my message.

It has not been easy to awaken people to my way of understanding life; my ancestors have had to suffer dismissal of our traditional practices over countless years. In view of our commitment to assert an Indigenous position, and in the spirit of the Seven Fires Prophecy, I try again.

I realize this file is not an easy one to resolve, given decisions, management, legislative, and development precedents. Yet this is one of the critical challenges of our times. Already, much pristine space has been lost to development.

In view of the body of information and the interest now come to light, I pray deep wisdom and urgent action will guide interventions and the crucial next steps. True consultation with a range of players, creative engagement, genuine exploration of options and opportunities and *time* can guide us to new pathways out of the forest.

With respect.

Sincerely,

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