

Circle of All Nations
Legacy Work of Dr. William Commanda, OC
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June 6, 2017

Greetings, Right Honourable Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and Former Governor Generals, Michaëlle Jean and Adrienne Clarkson

Re: A message regarding *Circle of All Nations*'s correspondence to the Queen, on behalf of the Late Algonquin Elder William Commanda and his Legacy Vision for an Indigenous Eco-Peace Healing Centre at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, in view of the May 2017 unprecedented flooding of the Ottawa River Watershed in Canada's National Capital Region, global environmental crisis, and escalating violence.

In the wake of the latest acts of violence in London, England, and furor regarding the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and other escalating global crises not very visible on the North American radar yet, I am forwarding to you correspondence sent to the Her Majesty and Queen Elizabeth and His Excellency, the Right Honourable David Johnson, Governor General of Canada, on behalf of Late Algonquin Elder William Commanda, founder, *Circle of All Nations*, and his legacy vision for the Sacred Chaudiere Site.

In part our letter to the Queen was prompted by the devastating flooding within the Ottawa River Watershed, the traditional territory of Elder Commanda during the month of May; but also in view of the attacks in Manchester – as you will recall, William Commanda's primary passions were focused on respect for Mother Earth and racial harmony and peace-building, and, many decades ago, he saw these as the two sides of the same coin, and with both in need of massive global attention.

Today, in view of the attacks on London Bridge, barely a few days after we completed the letter to the Queen, we add these thoughts: William Commanda was in South Africa in September 2001, for the UN's Second Conference against Racism and Xenophobia; (though he had supported Canada's preparations for the conference, he was not invited as part of Canada's delegation: he went on his own accord, because the issue of racism and the need for global reconciliation and peace building was of such passionate concern for him our then 88 year old). He was at the Sandton Centre in South Africa when he noted a

flurry of leaves blowing, and said, something bad has happened for the world; a few hours later, we learned about the twin towers going down in his homeland, and no one today will deny that all our lives have transformed dramatically since 9/11.

He continued with his passionate commitment to peace building. This year we celebrate Canada's 150th birthday; William Commanda commenced his very conscious political project to promote his vision for a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace* in his country with his first international gathering, in Eganville, Ontario, in 1967. It was a year later that he welcomed the then new Prime Minister, Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau, to his territory and his country. His work over the next 44 years was dedicated to planting seeds for peace building and environmental stewardship across North America, consistent with his responsibilities as Sacred Wampum Belt Carrier; this included the 1995/96 Sunbow Five Walk across the United States.

He also began to reclaim a relationship with his direct ancestral territory at the Sacred Chaudiere/Victoria Island Site in the sixties, seventies and increasingly thereafter, culminating with the articulation of a vision for a fully inclusive Indigenous Eco Peace Center: he raised it with Your Excellency, Adrienne Clarkson, during his Millennium Peace Gathering at Nepean Point in May 2000; former Prime Minister Chretien expressed interest and support for the vision developed in consultation with Algonquins from both the Ontario and Quebec sides of the Ottawa River Watershed, and the larger non-Indigenous community, by 2003; but sadly this momentum was curtailed by internal political struggles and then the sponsorship scandal; in 2010, his Legacy Vision for the *Asinabka* Sacred Chaudiere Site was endorsed by the City of Ottawa.

Unfortunately, since his death, his supporters have been embroiled in challenges with development interests at this acknowledged geologically, culturally and historically important ancient meeting place. Despite efforts to elevate discussion to the level of globally significant UNESCO Heritage Site designation, and provision of information justifying consideration as world civilization site aligned with the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Mayan Sun Pyramid, and Ankara Wat in Cambodia, (to engage all in the protection of this special site as a public one, versus one for privatization, massive condo development, commercial enterprise, and creation of European malls etc.,) and despite the fact that this remains unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered Algonquin Territory, development plans continue unabashedly and unashamedly.

Yet now, it would seem that the Ottawa River itself is now engaged in the challenge; Ms. Clarkson, you may recall an encounter with William Commanda at a garden party at Rideau Hall when you were slipped out of your shoes and your feet placed on the earth. Many of his friends believed William Commanda had a direct connection with the energy of Mother Earth, and he worked hard, nationally and publicly since the 1987 Constitutional Debates, and thereafter during the 1991 Pre-Rio deliberations in Paris, to alert us to the urgency of the escalating environmental challenges. He also inspired and animated the work of all the local environmental groups in the capital city from the early 2000s, supported the work of the Parks Canada Indigenous Advisory Committee, the Species at Risk Act and the effort to protect the ancient American Eel; challenged test

drilling for uranium in the Ottawa River Watershed, and served as Honorary Chair for the Heritage River Designation Committee.

Ms. Jean was acquainted with Elder Commanda's 2009 correspondence with the Queen, regarding his recognition of the critical need for a global think tank on Indigenous, peace and environmental issues, and Ms. Jean, your creation of the Commanda Hall at the University of Ottawa was re-animated with much interest in his work and ideas at the 2017 International Anthropology Conference at the University; thus it would appear that interest in his thinking and wisdom continues and grows globally, on the microscopic level.

We are in desperate need of high-level leadership to remove us from the zone of contentious engagement at the *Asinabka* Sacred Chaudiere Site to embrace a much larger vision. Right Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, you have done much to set the tone for a new Canada these past years, but we need something new and innovative to release new energy and ideas into environmental and peace building efforts of critical global import: Elder Commanda embraced and engaged the diverse peoples of Canada and elsewhere in the animation of such an approach, with his *Circle of All Nations* work. Elder Commanda articulated much of his vision for *Asinabka* when he was in his nineties; he had no funding or organizational support to help with his efforts; he called for a multi disciplinary task force to develop the core elements of his vision; and he left his ancestral territory at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, land of his own direct family, for all the world to share. Canada, with its own community of diversity, its own *circle of all nations*, has a critical role to play in the global world; people like me, who have come here via South Africa and India, know we don't need more of what we have experienced over the past hundreds of years: we need new tools to equip us for the challenges of the future, and William Commanda, who lived during a century of tremendous global change, was no fool when he envisioned a new path into the future. The Ottawa River presents us with another pivotal moment for new choice making. The latest global crises lend impetus to the need for something visionary, and sometimes that can come from David and not Goliath. Please help give vision space to grow.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter, and the letter to the Queen, which are being shared with other *Circle of All Nations* colleagues.

Sincerely,

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