

*Circle of All Nations
Legacy Work of Dr. William Commanda, OC
Algonquin Elder, Wampum Belt Carrier
506 Stratas Court, Kanata, Ontario
K2L 3K7 613-599-8385*



May 29, 2017

Her Majesty The Queen
Buckingham Palace
London, SW1A 1AA

Greetings, Your Majesty,

A message on behalf of the Late Algonquin Elder William Commanda and his Legacy Vision for an Indigenous Eco-Peace Healing Centre at the Sacred Chaudière 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 context of *The Honour of the Crown*, and in your 90th year, we ask you to consider the relevance of the global vision as part of your legacy through Canada.

I respectfully send you this letter in the context of the decades of peace and environmental work of Indigenous eco-peace activist, William Commanda

I am attaching correspondence to you from the late Algonquin Elder William Commanda, dating back to 2009, written while he was hospitalized, regarding his vision for an Indigenous healing and peace building centre at the *Asinabka* Sacred Chaudière Site, in Canada's capital city. I attach a photo of Your Majesty with him at a garden party at Rideau Hall: here he is showing you a silver medallion that you had sent him, then chief of his people, at the time of your coronation; at that 2010 garden party at Rideau Hall, he was likely, unbeknownst to most, the only person there to have had such a long and pertinent relationship with you, one indicative of a sovereign commitment dating back to the time of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and his ancestral grandmother of several generations ago, Piwanokwe Commanda, and yours, King George III. He wrote to you about a very tiny speck of his ancestral lands that span North America, one with which his family was directly affiliated, a historically acknowledged meeting place of Indigenous/Paleolithic Peoples for at least seven thousand years. Your ancestor Queen Victoria recognized the pivotal importance of this area and his ancestor Pakinawatik consented to the sharing of

the land in a formal negotiation with Prince Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, an event commemorated during your 2010 visit to Canada in Arnprior, and associated with the famous timber slide now swept over by the sewage of a raging Ottawa River at the site of the Sacred Chaudière Falls. I include a note on his water stewardship efforts. I also attach photos that may remind you of these things.

William Commanda, recipient of two honorary doctorate degrees and appointment as Officer of the Order of Canada, is an acknowledged leader of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in many places around the world, known for his affirmation of Indigenous rights and responsibilities, (retaining title of Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government from 1953 till his death); for his fierce defense of Mother Earth, nationally since Canada's constitutional discussions with Aboriginal Peoples in 1987, 30 years ago, and inter-nationally since the Pre-Rio Earth Summit Conference hosted by President Mitterand in Paris in 1991; and for his promotion of racial harmony and peace building: all consistent with his responsibilities as Carrier of Sacred Wampum Belts which hold the principles, values, commitments and records of his ancestors.

With the flooding of the Ottawa River, and tragedies such as has just erupted in Manchester, it grows increasingly apparent that the global community is in desperate need of new ideas and understanding to spark some dramatic shift in our world and world views. William Commanda worked till the day of his death at the age of 98, on August 3, 2011, to advance options to all the things that we now know to be the critical challenges of our age: climate change and unprecedented environmental crisis; global warfare and violence; and human physical, mental, emotional and spiritual break down everywhere; options based on approaches that he and his ancestors had asserted from *Time Immemorial*, predicated on their knowledge that *everything is related*. Modern science and technology are now beginning to explore ideas developed by Indigenous Peoples centuries ago.

William Commanda wished to see Indigenous thinking inspire joint brainstorming in the all-inclusive global eco peace think tank envisioned for his ancestral lands at the *Asinabka* Sacred Chaudière Site; further, he believed his people were long due a fair share of the grand natural resources of their lands, and integration of their ideas and values too, and he did not believe that he should have to beg for the materialization of such a place in his homeland, where all the world have forged their places, and from which all would benefit, leaving perhaps some legacy of hope for future generations.

Your standard reply to his letter, as Constitutional Sovereign, arrived during his annual international *Circle of All Nations* Gathering, when you referred him to Canadian authorities. To her great credit, Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, former Governor General of Canada,^[1]_[SEP] did what she could as your representative, to affirm Elder Commanda's wisdom and knowledge when she created the William Commanda Hall at the University of Ottawa during her term as Chancellor. You recently, on October 14, 2016, also referred world renowned Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal back to Canada, when he approached you about the *Asinabka* Chaudière Site project.

Your Majesty, since Elder Commanda's death, rights to the Chaudière Site have been seized by Windmill/Domtar developers, and the City of Ottawa's decision to rezone unceded, unsurrendered and unconquered Algonquin land at a sacred, geological heritage and historical site to permit privatization and condominium development has been appealed at several levels of justice available by the multiple diverse voices firmly committed to Elder Commanda's Legacy Vision for the area (thus far without an opportunity to present a proper case, given prescriptions of declining jurisdictions in law etc.).

The Commanda vision is the one articulated to you in 2009; it is one that sees the geologically unique circular waterfalls undammed to the extent possible, and the creation of a city eco-park (replanted with Indigenous species, perhaps with some repatriated from Kew Gardens), an Indigenous centre, and an eco-peace conference centre. It is vision that sees a once sacred meeting place of seven to ten thousand years, dating back to the time of the Paleolithic ancestors of humanity, which has been reduced to a contaminated brownfield since 1800, repurposed as a world heritage site, consistent with many UNESCO ideals (biosphere, geological, cultural, historical, Indigenous and intangible heritage). Now with the unprecedented flooding across the Ottawa River Watershed, many believe nature herself has joined the challenge (as indeed William Commanda believed would happen at the local and global level in view of our collective destructive anthropocentric relationship with Earth).

I shall not present you with details of the contestation and questionable actions in this land site challenge here; much archival information is available on our www.asinabka.com website.

However, I pick up at the point of relevant current developments, since they call attention to the Crown: (this too is almost too much detail, but since you, the Crown, are raised so flippantly in such a significant contemporary historical moment, I include it; sadly, we lack means for diplomatic intervention, and urgency drives us):

On April 27, 2017, Windmill Developer's Chairman, Jeff Westeinde stated that the legal challenge raised by Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal and Algonquin Grandmothers and others to protect the Chaudière Falls from development, saying that it is sacred land, won't slow the project: "Those are really between the Crown and the appellants. Err, so no, for us, no different than a lot of the other land title challenges that are going on across Canada, for lands, many of which are now private; those private citizens are able to continue to use their lands while the Crown and appellants sort that kind of thing out". (APTN National News, April 27, 2017). Note please that from the outset, we have challenged ownership issues, and claims that these are private lands, in unceded, unsurrendered, unconquered Algonquin Territory: and documents provided by *Circle of All Nations* colleague, Lindsay Lambert, attest to these facts: one dated April 27, 2017, from Government of Canada, Real Properties Development (Andy Smith) regarding development of Chaudière, Victoria and Albert Island (the Islands) states: "I appreciate the cultural and historical context you brought forward with regard to the Islands. The National Capital Commission (NCC), through the *National Capital Act*, seeks to preserve

and enhance Canada's Capital as a place of national importance and pride. Certain properties are deemed by the NCC to be of National Interest Land Mass (NILM). The NCC considers NILM lands as symbolically meaningful to Canadians are needed to achieve the NCC's long term plans for Canada's Capital Region. NILM Lands are held in trust by the NCC as a legacy for future Canadian generations. Public Service and Procurement Canada lands on the Islands were designated NILM lands several years ago. Public Service and Procurement Canada manages small portions of the Islands only. The majority of the Department's lands are leased to third-parties, including the NCC, Energy Ottawa, Chaudière Hydro L.P. and Domtar Inc. As these NILM lands are no longer required for departmental program purposes, the Department intends to transfer them to the NCC. All the leases will be assigned as part of the transfer. The NCC will be responsible for the future use of these lands".

We note that during their April 4, 2017, the National Capital Commission (NCC) released their Canada 150 announcement affirming the Windmill Development plans at Chaudière; these were publicly challenged by multiple parties in the context of outstanding issues under contestation by the Commanda vision. In fact, further, it is the Commanda vision, and not the massive private condo and mall installations plan, that is consistent with the principles of the NILM.

Lindsay Lambert also makes reference to "An Act respecting certain Works on the Ottawa River," wherein Parliament has exclusive authority over everything in or on the Ottawa River, irrespective of whether it is for the purpose of public utility or not, or constructed by the Government or private interests. It was assented to on May 12th, 1870, and is still current. The Chaudière Islands had already been reserved for Public Purposes at that time (and this is affirmed by the City of Ottawa's decision to rezone the lands from public lands designation to permit the privatization). This Act of 1870 can only be changed through a new Act of Parliament.

Neither shall I present further details on the Commanda vision (for which he proposed the creation of a multi-disciplinary task force, he being an old man in his nineties, with no formal organization for support and only his old age pension for funds; this too has been documented in detail on the website. But I point out also that at this time of social media and national and international exposure to Indigenous issues and crises, we are all increasingly aware of the abuses of Indigenous land rights, the residential school legacy, the plight of murdered and missing women, the crises in child care, education, housing, health and suicide; and the need for truth and reconciliation is publicly affirmed here in Canada. Yet we see the war museum, Jewish holocaust memorial, condos, European malls and dam projects emerge at the contested Chaudière meeting place, and the colonial place marking continues shamelessly and unabashedly.

In 1967, on the occasion of Canada's 100th birthday, William Commanda launched his own consciously political campaign to create a *Circle of All Nations, a Culture of Peace*, with his first international gathering, to address the issues of Indigenous presence, racism and

peace building, healing, and to stress importance of Mother Earth in the geologically and archaeologically important area in Eganville, Ontario. This was before he welcomed then new Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to his territory and country in 1968. On this 150th birthday of Canada, his daughter, friends and colleagues continue to affirm Elder Commanda's legacy, and five years after his death, he remains "encore vivant" and his wisdom and teaching is reaching more and more people across the world, including at the academic level, as interest in him at a 2017 International Anthropology Conference at the University of Ottawa attests.

The need for an Indigenous center of healing and reconciliation such as he conceived is urgently needed in a world in crisis. Bureaucratic and corporate responses do not adequately recognize the critical nature of the issues at stake. William Commanda's ancestors always did. William Commanda also raised this matter with your son, His Highness, Prince Charles in 2010. His daughter Evelyn Commanda Dewache brought her father's vision to the attention of Princess Anne in 2014, at a tree planting event at Rideau Hall, in the presence of his Excellency, the Governor General. It remains a compelling priority to us.

You will understand that William Commanda and his *Circle of All Nations* non-Indigenous and Indigenous colleagues have been addressing the challenges outlined above intensively with government over the past decades. William Commanda presented you with his 2005 book, *Learning From a Kindergarten Dropout*, years ago, and it reflects on precisely these challenges that face us in a colonized land like Canada. In a separate moves, Quebec Algonquin First Nations have served government notice that they are laying claim to title to the area, and Traditional Algonquin Grandmothers have asserted similar land interest, the Sacred Chaudière Site being at the centre of the concerns. Some Algonquin individuals are aligned with development, for their own reasons. We consider this land challenge a work in progress, and are sharing copies of this correspondence with leadership in Canada.

Your Majesty, we humbly ask you to PLEASE give this some personal attention. Fifty years ago, William Commanda reaffirmed the *sharing* his ancestors had committed to with French and English settlers in the presence of the Vatican, with the 1700s Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt. In a sense this fifty year anniversary of William Commanda's *Circle of All Nations* work is a Jubilee Year of a sort: he quoted regularly, from Leviticus, the admonition that "the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land ... It will be returned in the Jubilee, and *he* can then go back to his property."

There was always a hope, prayer and expectation, buried in the depths of his heart, and in his prayer, *Ginawaydaganuc, Everything is Connected*, that some gesture of acknowledgement, reconciliation, gratitude for the generous sharing of this land, some recognition of the rights of the rightful occupants of the land, and some respect for their vision for appropriate use of sacred place, would manifest, when the world truly understood the implications of global connections.

We believe, as William Commanda always did, that this is a matter for *The Honour of the Crown*, and in your 90th year, we ask you to consider the relevance of the global vision as part of your legacy as well: we know you presented a brick to the First Nations University in Regina, in affirmation of royal relationship with Indigenous Peoples of Canada; in 2006, (as noted in the attached documents from 2009) William Commanda was presented with the *Key to the City of Ottawa* on Victoria Island; speaking in metaphorical language, we already have symbolical items for the Centre: a handle for the door, and a lock and key, ironically via India, a once jewel in the British Crown; the Sacred Chaudière Site is the *Jewel* of Canada: it is also the *Golden Goose*; and it is the Indigenous gift to the world. We are in desperate need of someone to open the door to our inclusive future as a global community, mindful that we are indeed all inter-related and inter-dependent, including with Mother Earth and the powerful waters of the Ottawa River. In a country today inclusive of the peoples of the world, the British Empire and the Commonwealth, perhaps there is some gesture you may be able to initiate to save this singular precious, sacred, geological, heritage and historical meeting place, recognized as such by your ancestor, Queen Victoria and see its realization as a place of healing of relationships, with Mother Earth, amongst Indigenous Peoples, and with all others. Perhaps one of your grandsons might take an interest in this global work.

Your Majesty, many thanks indeed for your consideration of this correspondence.

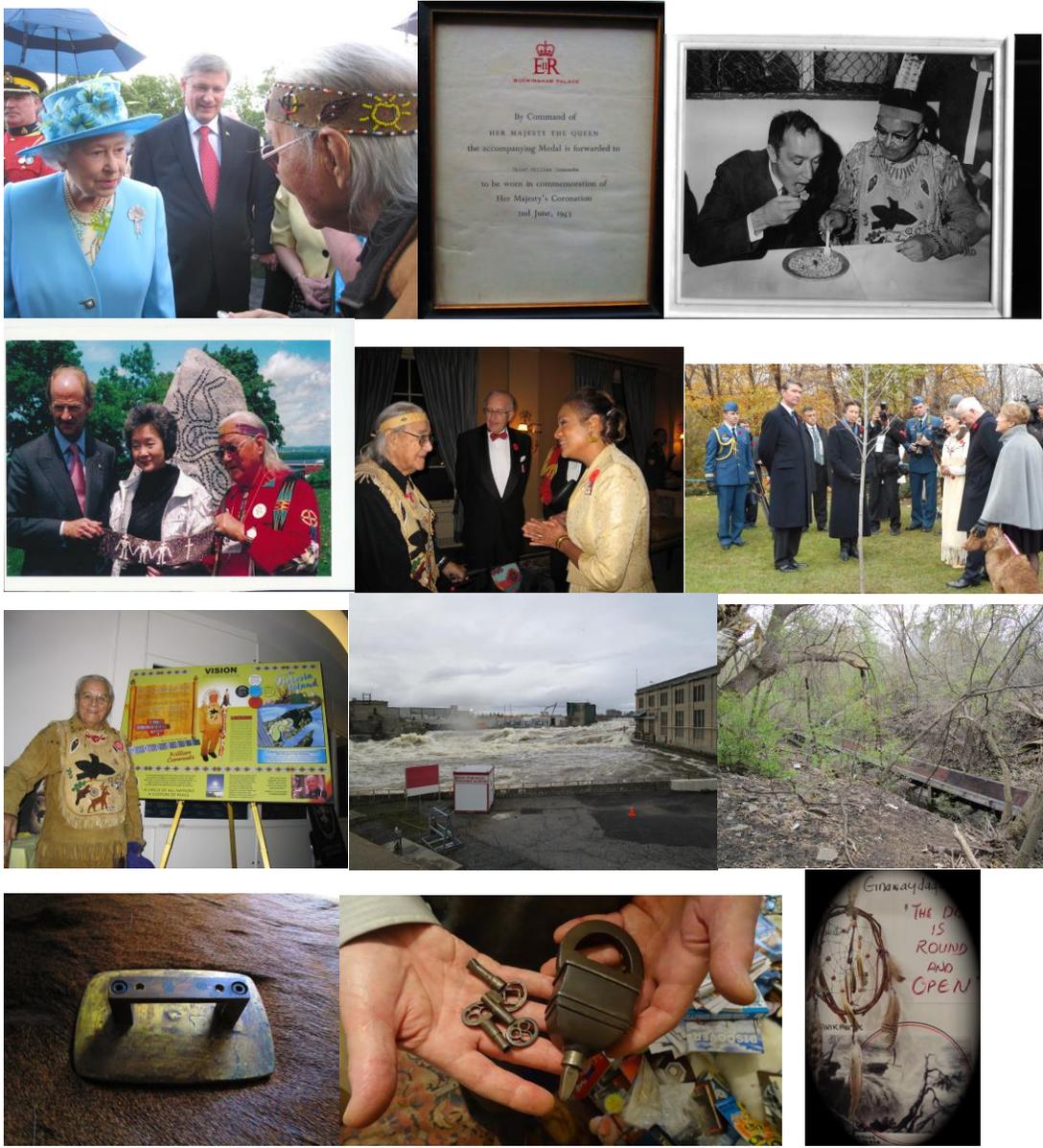
Submitted with deep respect, and also with much gratitude for your many years of service as Monarch – it was my great uncle, K. Vamblie, a soldier, who broke rank to greet your parents and kiss your mother's hand, in the hope of a global community, when you were a toddler visiting my birthplace, South Africa; and *Circle of All Nations* reaffirms the deep salute to you!

Sincerely,

Romola V. Thumbadoo
Coordinator, Circle of All Nations
Legacy Work of Dr. William Commanda, OC
Algonquin Elder, Wampum Belt Carrier
506 Stratas Court, Kanata, Ontario K2L 3K7
circleofallnations@sympatico.ca
www.asinabka.com; www.circleofallnations.ca



Photographs of relevance to the 29 May, 2017 letter to the Queen concerning William Commanda's Legacy Vision for the Sacred Chaudiere Site, Ottawa, Canada



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Coordinator, Circle of All Nations
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