

William Commanda – Address at the Public Consultation regarding the Danford Mega-Dump Project – June 13, 2007

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts about the proposed dump project.

First, by way of introduction, may I say I am William Commanda, ninety three year old Algonquin Elder from Kitigan Zibi, Quebec. My ancestors resided at the Lake of Two Mountains, and the Ottawa River Watershed is the traditional territory of my ancestors from time immemorial. I have a passionate interest in the plight of Mother Earth, and in particular in the stewardship of the Ottawa River Watershed. I currently serve as Honorary Chair of the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee, and I have tried, thus far without success, to engage the Province of Quebec in this effort. I also work to promote cross cultural understanding, racial harmony and peace building, through the *Circle of All Nations* – a global eco-community united by values of respect for Mother Earth and Racial Harmony.

In recognition of my efforts, in 2005, I was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree by the University of Ottawa. In 2006, I was presented with both the Key to the Capital City by the Mayor of Ottawa, a special honour for someone who resides in Quebec, and a International Peace Day Award by the Mayor of Montreal, which together constitute a recognition and acknowledgement of my commitment to the Ottawa River Watershed.

The following is a list of activities I have personally been engaged with in terms of my environmental work:

Chronology of Key Activities in Support of Mother Earth

- 1945 - Precursor – Hopi/Indigenous Petition to the UN
- 1967 - First Gathering focused on Mother Earth and Peace – at Eganville, Ont
- 1967 - Gathering of Nations in Maniwaki re: Indigenous Wisdom
- 1987 - Presentation of Wampum Belts at Constitutional Talks
- 1991 - Pipe Ceremony at Pre Rio Preparations in France
- 1992 - Message to Earth Summit in Rio – Agenda 21
- 1993 - Cry of the Earth Conference at UN
- 1995 - Spiritual Guide of the Sunbow Five Walk for Mother Earth (across the continent)

- 1996 - Release of the Report of the RCAP – When I raised concerns about the condition of the Ottawa River
- 2004 - Honorary Elder – Boreal Rendezvous
- 2004 - Heritage Rivers Bill Mason Conservation Award
- 2006 – Honorary Chair – Ottawa Heritage River Designation
- 2006 – WaterLife Workshop
- Annual Circle of All Nations Gatherings Promote Environmental Stewardship - 2004 – Focus on Water
- Annual Gathering of Nations Pipe Ceremonies at Victoria Island

Thus you will note that over the past twenty years, my concern over environmental issues have been a major preoccupation. In 1987, when I presented our sacred Wampum Belts in public at the constitutional debate, Quebec absented herself from the discussion; I pointed out that, with the denigration and exclusion of the values and practices of the indigenous peoples in the development of this country, the desecration of the soil, waters and air, the depletion of trees, plants and animals, and the subsequent impact on our lives has been profound, and required immediate remedial action. However, the voice of indigenous peoples remains marginalized in discussions about the environment, and to many of us it is no wonder that we are now in a global crisis around pollution, green house gas emissions, global warming, unprecedented climate change and upheaval. Our lives are being transformed irrevocably, and it will take profound collective commitment, will and cooperation to leave a healthy world to our children.

Indigenous peoples always walked gently on Mother Earth, consistent with the Laws of Nature, always preparing for the seventh generation. Departure from this guiding principle through decades of environmental exploitation and abuse has resulted in long term, sometimes irreversible, damage to the Earth, that future generations will have to bear the burden of.

In my own reserve, a trench dump was established, I believe in the eighties, and even the city of Maniwaki dumped their refuse here; I recall seeing countless refrigerators and stoves, washers and dryers there. Then the hospital called and warned us not to drink our water. Today, and over the past decade, we do not drink the water on my reserve; water is trucked in bottles; a short while ago, we took pride in honouring the 22 lakes in our territory; today, the water is unsafe, there are more people dying of cancer and other diseases, and in my own family, three children are fighting cancer,

and my great, great grandson has one kidney. You know that problems with water are no longer limited to reserves.

In November 2006, I organized a special Water Life Workshop to encourage more attention to the continued desecration of the precious essential of life – water. In this past year alone, we have begun to awaken to the hazards posed to the Ottawa River, the sacred river of my peoples, by a range of conditions: green algae, chemical contaminant expelled into the Ottawa River around Pembroke, the sulphuric acid spill outside North Bay, dead fish near Arnprior, bacteria and pollution in the river, and threat of uranium mining on the Mississippi. A few weeks ago, I took photos of fish rotting on the Gatineau River. Even today, there are reports of people in hospital with skin inflammations having immersed in the Ottawa River.

I have also added my voice to the effort to designate the American Eel a *species at risk*. I attach my comments here for your information:

I wish to add my name to the list of people petitioning for the designation of the American Eel as a Species at Risk.

I am a 93 year old Algonquin of the Ottawa River Watershed, and I currently also serve as Honorary Chair on the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee. I have been deeply concerned with the devastating transformation of this watershed and areas beyond throughout the course of my lifetime, and I have been increasingly actively engaged in efforts to promote respect for Mother Earth and all that inhabit her, over the past twenty years. This effort was in part recognized by the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, when, in 2004, I was presented with the Bill Mason Conservation Award.

Over the past ten years, I have also been involved in developing an integrated vision for an international environmentally focussed healing and peace building centre at the sacred meeting place of my ancestors, *Asinabka*, site of the Chaudière Falls in Ottawa, a centre to advance respect for Mother Earth, Indigenous Peoples and all others, and in my mind, these are interrelated matters of grave concern for the world. Last November, I organized a Water Life Workshop, in part to advance this effort, but also to encourage better stewardship of the Ottawa River. This led me to an effort to dissuade Domtar Inc. from expanding the Hydro Electric Plant at the Chaudière Falls. Amongst

other concerns, I have been upset by evidence of the destructive impact of turbines on eels in some graphic photographs.

I believe it is of crucial importance that we all reexamine our invasive and destructive relationship with Mother Earth and all her creatures, and many are beginning to hear this cry. Every day, it seems we hear of the desperate state of yet another species, and the current focus on sharks highlights the interrelated ramifications of the destruction of individual species.

At this point I am raising my voice concerning the plight of the American Eel. The eel has been of spiritual, nutritional and material importance to the Indigenous Peoples of the eastern seaboard, and to my ancestors of the Ottawa River Watershed, since time immemorial, has played a role in the Donald Marshall Junior struggle for the recognition of indigenous fishing rights, and I believe eel spirit is intrinsic to the sacred Seven Fire Prophecy Wampum Belt that I have carried for the people for over thirty six years. It is this prophecy that tells us that humanity is now at a cross roads, and that we need to regenerate our relationship with Mother Earth and each other, and it is a message I delivered at the December 2006 Minster's Round Table on *Species at Risk*; a short few months later, we all alert to the issues of global environmental and human crisis.

The voice of Mother Nature is speaking loudly and urgently, and today, I add my voice to those of the many wishing to halt the development of the proposed major engineered landfill, because of the threat it poses to the lakes and rivers in the vicinity of Danford, and to the Ottawa River Watershed. All modern studies alert us to these dangers to the earth and water table.

This is a crucial time in our country's and in global history, when we must urgently explore new an innovative and comprehensive options to address the challenges presented by a modern, post industrialized, urbanized world, and we must be guided by a principle of economics enunciated by friend Ann Pennington – “Net Global Planetary Benefit”. We have to understand and address the interrelatedness of issues.

It seems clear that two new technologies offer new options for waste management – Incineration and Plasma Gasification, and both are

possible answers to respond to the new environmental laws and needs. Both incorporate economic incentives/benefits, and minimize negative environmental impact.

I would also like to add that I take a special vision from Quebec to the Capital City for the Sacred Chaudière Site – a vision for spiritual reconciliation with Mother Earth, by undamming the Chaudière Dam and planting trees on Chaudière Island; and for enshrining the heritage and history of the area, in both an international indigenous healing and peace-building centre, and a historic site that will celebrate the meeting of the three cultures of the Aboriginal, French and English and the subsequent development of Canada.

Now I see that heat generated by the Incineration and Plasma Gasification options can replace the hydro dams, and move us towards a more harmonious relationship with Mother Earth, and contribute to a significant portion of this vision. I attach a bilingual note on this vision.

I pray you will be moved to join me and others in this effort to hold constructive dialogue and advance harmonious exchange of ideas, so that we can come together making our best efforts to leave a meaningful legacy to our children and the world.

Thank you for your attention to my message.

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Dr. William Commanda

PROPOSAL FOR A SPECIAL NATIONAL HISTORIC CENTRE AT ASINABKA/CHAUDIÈRE FALLS, OTTAWA, CANADA

A proposal for development of a special National Historic Centre at the sacred Chaudière Falls, Ottawa, Canada

ISSUE:

The vision calls for a fully inclusive City Park, Historic Interpretative Site, Conference Centre and Aboriginal Centre at the Sacred Site of *Asinabka*/Chaudière Falls, Chaudière and Victoria Islands, within the Nation's Capital

BACKGROUND:

Since the arrival of Samuel de Champlain in this area in 1613, the area around the Chaudière Falls has been acknowledged as a sacred meeting place of great importance to indigenous peoples, having been used as such for easily five thousand years. Indeed, it is one of the earliest sites of human occupation in this country. Later, it served as a significant meeting place with the earliest settlers, the French and the English. Today the world finds a home on its shores.

This special area holds singular sacred, archaeological and historic value, and has been the site of cultural convergence, political evolution, and internationally influential industrial development and innovation over the past centuries.

The *Ottawa River Heritage Designation History* celebrates this remarkable heritage of the watershed, and the heart of the story lies here in Ottawa/Hull, at the meeting place of three rivers, with the mighty Ottawa, the heritage river of the Algonquins, connecting with the Gatineau from the Province of Quebec and the Rideau from the Province of Ontario.

Elder William Commanda, a trilingual 93 year old Algonquin from Quebec, recently honoured by the University of Ottawa with the presentation of an Honorary Doctorate Degree, and in June 2006, presented with the Key to the City of Ottawa, a remarkable, internationally recognized man with a passionate interest in the environment, this country and all its citizens, and founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, holds a broad vision for the entire area focused on two themes that predominate in his work: Respect for the Mother Earth and Racial Harmony and Peace-building. Today, the environmental crisis and war are our greatest national preoccupations and challenges.

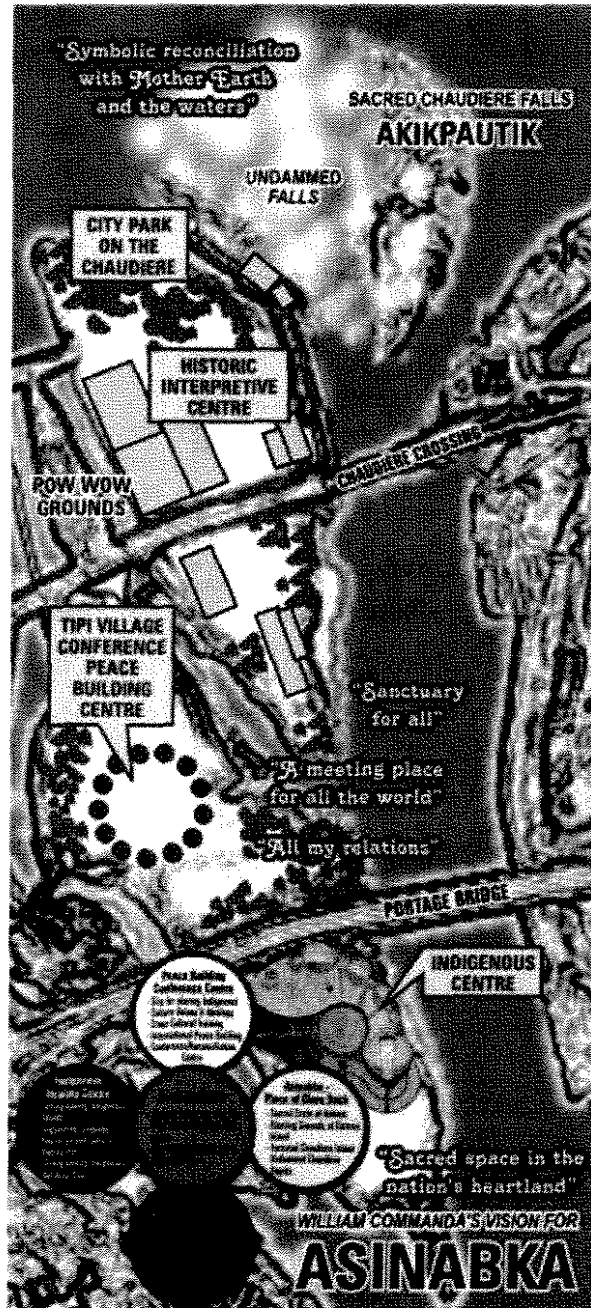
THE ACTIVITY:

Dr. Commanda's bold four-fold vision calls for

- 1) Freeing the Chaudière Falls,
- 2) Creating a City Park & Historic Interpretative Centre
- 3) Building a Peace Building Meeting Site, and
- 4) Building an Aboriginal Centre

DETAILS:

1. It is a vision of potentially significant international influence for symbolic reconciliation with Nature, both water and land, by **undamming the sacred Chaudière Falls to the extent possible, and returning it to its former magnificence**; planting the Chaudière Island with trees and creating an educational eco-city park in the heart



of the country, expressive of both of its history, and its future, offering a modern day reclaimed green sanctuary and pow wow grounds to offset concrete urban sprawl; it also calls for developing a historic interpretative centre to commemorate the history of settlement pre and post contact; ceremony, ancient trade routes, exchange of goods, logging, hydro electric power, industrial development, inventions etc.

2. Consistent with the ancient history as meeting place, and current need for creative meeting spaces designed to serve as collaborative think tanks for reflective contemplation on global and local issues during this UN Decade for Culture of Peace, for international cross-cultural exchange and training, the remaining portion of the vision calls for a *Tipi Village pod-style conference hotel* on the western portion of Victoria Island, fully accessible within the core area of the capital city.

3. Finally, for almost four decades, the Eastern portion of Victoria Island has been designated the site for an Aboriginal Centre; over the past eight years, Elder Commanda has worked to develop a vision for the Centre; Aboriginal Architect Douglas Cardinal, with support from Canadian Heritage, developed the conceptual architectural plans to the Level B; Elder Commanda negotiated a draft Memorandum to Cabinet with a consultant for the National Capital Commission, and at the Circle of All Nations International Gathering of August 2006, the NCC expressed full support for this proposal.

4. The entire site will be a great attraction for Aboriginal peoples, citizens of the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, the country at large, children, new Canadians and international tourists.

5. Though damaged over the years, the sacred Chaudière site of the Algonquin Peoples remains a beautiful natural and national treasure waiting to be recognized and honoured.

6. Elder Commanda's vision also offers a unique opportunity to *Correct Mistakes of History and Look Towards the Future*.

7. It is recognized that this work spans many federal departments, jurisdictions and responsibility centres. It needs a collective and collaborative national will and leadership to create the momentum for its successful realization.

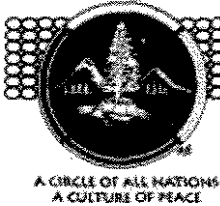
TIME FRAME:

The timing is propitious for the bestowing a lasting national and indeed international legacy commemorative of the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace, in anticipation of two key dates: 2010, when the world comes to Canada for the Olympics, and 4 June, 2013, the four hundredth year anniversary of the arrival of Champlain in this area (June being also the time Heritage Rivers Day is celebrated). A spring 2007 announcement will ensure the timely actualization of the vision.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Widespread endorsement of this fully inclusive proposal through the establishment of a multi disciplinary task force to develop the implementation plan for the Sacred Site.

Send your message of support to pm@pm.gc.ca and circleofallnations@sympatico.ca.



par Dr. William Commanda

PROPOSITION D'UN CENTRE HISTORIQUE NATIONAL AUX ASINABKA/CHUTES DE LA CHAUDIÈRE, OTTAWA (CANADA)

Le projet d'aménagement d'un Centre historique national au site sacré des chutes de la Chaudière à Ottawa

VISION:

Cette vision se compose de l'aménagement d'un site complet qui comprendrait un parc municipal, un site d'interprétation historique, un centre de conférences ainsi qu'un centre autochtone sur les lieux sacrés d'Asinabka (les chutes de la Chaudière et les îles Chaudière et Victoria), en plein cœur de la capitale nationale.

HISTORIQUE:

Depuis l'arrivée de Samuel de Champlain dans cette région en 1613, les lieux qui entourent les chutes de la Chaudière ont été reconnus comme étant des lieux sacrés de rencontre pour les peuples autochtones, lieux qui sont d'une grande importance pour eux puisque cet usage date d'au moins cinq mille ans. En effet, il s'agit de l'un des plus anciens sites occupés par des humains au pays. Plus tard, cet endroit a également servi de lieu de rencontre avec les premiers pionniers, les Français et les Anglais. Aujourd'hui, le monde entier pourrait y trouver un lieu de rencontre, un chez soi.

Cet endroit spécial est imbu d'une valeur singulière, puisqu'il s'agit d'une valeur qui est à la fois sacrée, archéologique et historique; c'est un lieu de convergences, où l'évolution politique et l'innovation et le développement industriels se sont fait sentir à l'échelle internationale au cours des derniers siècles.

L'histoire de la désignation patrimoniale de la rivière des Outaouais célèbre le patrimoine remarquable de ce bassin important et le cœur de cette histoire se retrouve ici, à Ottawa/Hull, où trois rivières se rencontrent : la majestueuse *Kitchissippi* (rivière des Outaouais/Ottawa river), rivière patrimoniale des Algonquins, dans laquelle se jettent la rivière Gatineau du côté québécois et la rivière Rideau du côté ontarien.

L'ainé William Commanda, un Algonquin trilingue de 93 ans vivant au Québec, à qui l'Université d'Ottawa a récemment rendu hommage en lui présentant un Doctorat honorifique, et à qui la ville d'Ottawa a remis, à l'été 2006, la Clef de la ville d'Ottawa, est un homme remarquable, connu à l'échelle internationale et qui possède une passion pour l'environnement, pour ce pays-ci et pour tous ses citoyens. Ayant fondé le Cercle de toutes les nations (*Circle of All Nations*), il cultive une vision d'ensemble pour la région dont l'emphase repose sur deux principes qui guident toujours son travail : le respect de notre Mère la Terre et la culture de la paix, de l'harmonie inter-raciale. Aujourd'hui, la crise environnementale et la guerre sont nos préoccupations et nos défis les plus importants.

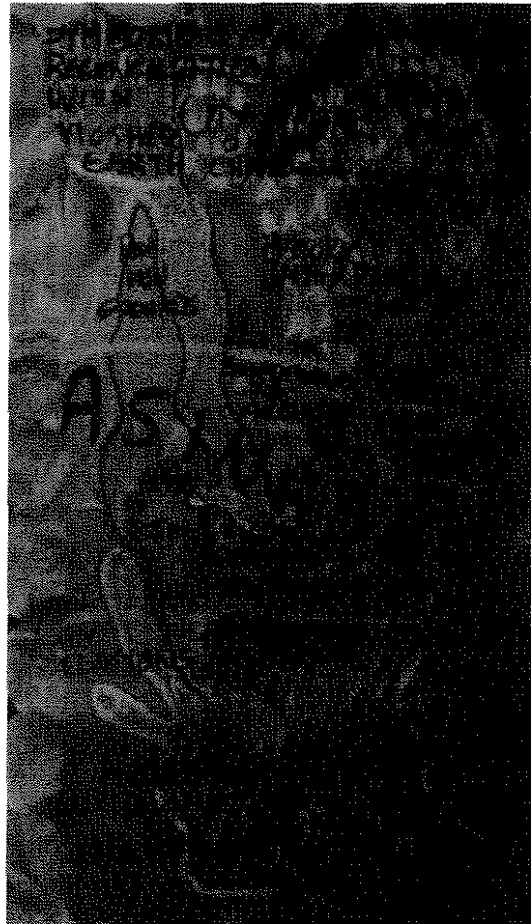
ACTIVITÉS:

La vision courageuse du Dr. Commanda comporte quatre éléments principaux :

- 1) La libération des chutes de la Chaudière
- 2) La création d'un parc municipal et d'un centre d'interprétation historique
- 3) La construction d'un centre de conférences voué à la Paix
- 4) La construction d'un centre autochtone

DÉTAILS:

1. Le démantèlement de la dame des chutes sacrées de la Chaudière, dans la mesure du possible, et la restauration de l'ancienne majesté de ces chutes, ont le potentiel d'avoir une influence internationale comme symbole de réconciliation avec la nature, à la fois avec l'eau et avec la Terre. En plantant des arbres et en créant un parc écologique éducatif sur l'île Chaudière, en plein cœur du pays, l'histoire et le futur trouveraient leur



place, côte à côte, dans ce retour contemporain d'un sanctuaire de verdure et d'un terrain de *pow wow*, adoucissant aussi les étendues de béton du centre-ville. Un centre d'interprétation historique y commémorerait l'histoire de la région avant et après le contact avec les Européens : les cérémonies, les anciennes routes d'échange, la coupe du bois, le développement hydroélectrique et industriel, les inventions, etc., toutes choses qui font la richesse de cette région.

2. Afin de respecter l'ancienneté de cet endroit comme lieu de rencontre et pour répondre aux besoins contemporains en lieux propices pour réfléchir et collaborer à la recherche de solutions aux questions locales et mondiales de l'heure en cette Décennie internationale pour une culture de la paix de l'ONU, la vision propose un centre de conférences prenant la forme d'un hôtel modulaire basé sur le modèle d'un village de tipis dans la partie ouest de l'île Victoria, favorisant des séances de formation et des échanges inter-culturels internationaux, tout à fait accessibles, en plein cœur de la capitale.

3. Enfin, depuis presque quatre décennies, la partie est de l'île Victoria est désignée comme site pour un centre autochtone; au cours des huit dernières années, l'ainé Commanda a travaillé à mettre au point une vision pour ce centre : l'architecte autochtone Douglas Cardinal, avec l'appui de Patrimoine canadien, a élaboré des plans architecturaux de niveau B; l'ainé Commanda a négocié la présentation d'un projet de loi au Cabinet avec un conseiller de la Commission de la capitale nationale (CCN), et au mois d'août 2006, lors de la rencontre internationale du Cercle de toutes les nations, la CCN a exprimé son plein appui pour ce projet.

4. Le site entier sera d'un grand attrait pour les peuples autochtones, pour les citoyens de Gatineau et d'Ottawa, pour tous les citoyens canadiens, les enfants, les nouveaux citoyens et les visiteurs de partout dans le monde.

5. Bien qu'endommagé au cours des ans, le site de la Chaudière, site sacré des peuples Algonquins, demeure un trésor national naturel d'une grande beauté, qui n'attend que d'être reconnu et mis en valeur.

6. La vision de l'ainé Commanda offre aussi l'unique possibilité de *corriger des erreurs de l'histoire et de présenter une vision d'avenir*.

7. Nous reconnaissons qu'un projet d'une telle envergure relève de l'autorité de nombreux ministères fédéraux ainsi que de divers paliers et organismes : c'est pourquoi une volonté collective et un esprit de collaboration et de leadership nationaux sont requis pour mettre en œuvre un tel projet et en assurer le succès.

RÉALISATION:

L'heure est propice à la création d'un héritage national et même international qui aura longue vie, à la fois pour souligner la Décennie internationale pour une culture de la paix de l'ONU et pour marquer deux dates importantes : l'an 2010, lorsque le monde entier viendra au Canada pour les Olympiques et le 4 juin 2013, le 400^e anniversaire de l'arrivée de Champlain dans cette région (le mois de juin étant aussi le mois de célébration de la journée des rivières patrimoniales, *Heritage Rivers Day*). Une annonce diffusée au printemps 2007 veillera à la réalisation propice de la vision.

ACTION DEMANDÉE:

- un appui répandu de cette proposition globale et la création d'un comité de travail multidisciplinaire qui sera chargé d'élaborer un plan de réalisation pour ce site sacré. Envoyez votre message d'appui à pm@pm.gc.ca et circleofallnations@sympatico.ca.