

Podcast: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2018/12/22/follow-up-podcast-indigenous-land-claim_a_23625393/?ncid=other_email_o63gt2jcad4&utm_campaign=share_email

Attention: Althia Raj
Follow-Up with Althia Raj
Huffington Post

29 January 2019



Circle of All Nations
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Dear Althia Raj,

Re: Follow-Up Podcast: Ottawa Indigenous Land Claim Tests Liberals' Nation-To-Nation Promise

I am writing regarding the December 10, 2018 Podcast on Follow-Up, with you and Zi-Ann Lum. I was out of the country at the time of its airing, and my thesis supervisor sent me the link, knowing I would be interested in view of the mention of Elder William Commanda.

Background

Elder William Commanda is mentioned several times in your posting. You will know then that he was highly respected by Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples in the National Capital Region and beyond. Carrier of the Sacred Wampum Heritage of his ancestors, founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, he was recipient of the Key to the City of Ottawa in 2006, was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada, and was presented with two honorary doctorate degrees from each side of the Ottawa River, amongst countless other honours and acknowledgements. Posthumously, under former Governor General Michaëlle Jean's lead as Chancellor, the University of Ottawa created the William Commanda Hall in recognition of his knowledge and wisdom, and Carleton University named its Indigenous Resource Centre, Ojigkwanong, Morning Star, after him. He was the first person to offer a prayer and advice on for Murdered and Missing Women, and his initiation of national attention to Indigenous Language is available on the website of the Commissioner of Official Languages, in an article entitled *The Beginning of a Dialogue*:

http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/newsletter_cyberbulletin/24_05_2011/index_e.htm
http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/newsletter_cyberbulletin/24_05_2011/index_f.htm

I completed my thesis entitled *Ginawaydaganuc and the Circle of All Nations – The Remarkable Environmental Legacy of Elder William Commanda* at Carleton University in 2018,

(<https://curve.carleton.ca/aa4e3cbb-5b83-464d-8286-a901fcd77b06>) in part to research and share the depth and nature of his thinking and wisdom. I met him in 1997 and thereafter dedicated my life to supporting every aspect of his work.

Thank you for raising so many important contemporary Indigenous issues in the podcast. You note that Zi-Ann has acquired a mass of research for the story. There is much more, and this alters the nuance of the story. While I find all the issues you raise very important, particularly in view of my own work in Indigenous Justice since 1987, in this message, I am only addressing items linked to the Sacred Chaudiere Site from a William Commanda perspective. This is a long “storytelling” note, and to a certain extent it follows the flow of your interview.

Elder Commanda worked hard till his death at the age of 97 to animate a global eco-peace community, the *Circle of All Nations*, and promote racial harmony and environmental stewardship in a world he saw becoming increasingly distraught and self-destructive. He also worked for over two decades with literally thousands of people from across the world, including Donald Marshall Junior, whose name stands for justice and Indigenous rights, world renowned Architect Douglas Cardinal (who had been engaged with site development plans from 1970, and from 1998, in collaboration with Elder Commanda), with the federal and provincial government representatives, the National Capital Commission (NCC), and the City of Ottawa, to develop a comprehensive global vision for the ancient meeting grounds of his direct ancestors at the Sacred Chaudiere Site. Note here a photo-journal chronological summary of key consultations - [2015-08-18 Asinabka Chronology VIRTUAL INSTITUTE](#). Under leadership of the Ministry of Canadian Heritage, the NCC advanced this work in 2004; this was thwarted by the 2006 Sponsorship Scandal. In 2008 its NCC Chairman Marcel Beaudry made a formal announcement of support for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island (pdf attached below; a video recording of his speech is also available). In November 2010, the City of Ottawa endorsed Elder Commanda’s entire comprehensive vision for the Asinabka Sacred Chaudiere Site and Islands; [2010-02-14 CAN Report on the Vision for Asinabka](#) (You will note that every page is stamped by the City of Ottawa on the PDF file attached below). Unfortunately, his death in 2011 left his work vulnerable to changes in political leadership, development pressures and Algonquin community divisions, this compounded by the land claim challenges you examine in your article.

Challenging Rezoning of Sacred Lands to Permit Privatization and Related Issues

In 2012, Windmill Development, under the leadership of Jeff Westeinde, who you interviewed for your podcast, presented a plan to advance rezoning of the “public” Chaudiere Site being managed by NCC to permit privatization (note that the massive condo development plans were not presented at their initial public event). He states in your interview, there is “a significant lack of clarity” on land issues; further, The Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations states “Canada and the Crown will have to be corrected all the way because we have a pretty ingrained attitude of paternity and superiority” when you discuss the land claim issue. I note also AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde’s assertion that First Nations occupy 2% of this vast country.

It is a wonder that there is no national outcry that this sacred heart of the country, within the National Capital Region, (under NCC’s mandate is to manage the National Capital Region lands on behalf of all Canadians), the unceded, unsundered and unconquered lands of William

Commanda's direct ancestors, designated by him for sharing with all, can be subjected to the colonial take-over of old, which the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was created to address. Perhaps your podcast, over seven years after the death of Elder Commanda, will provoke that attention.

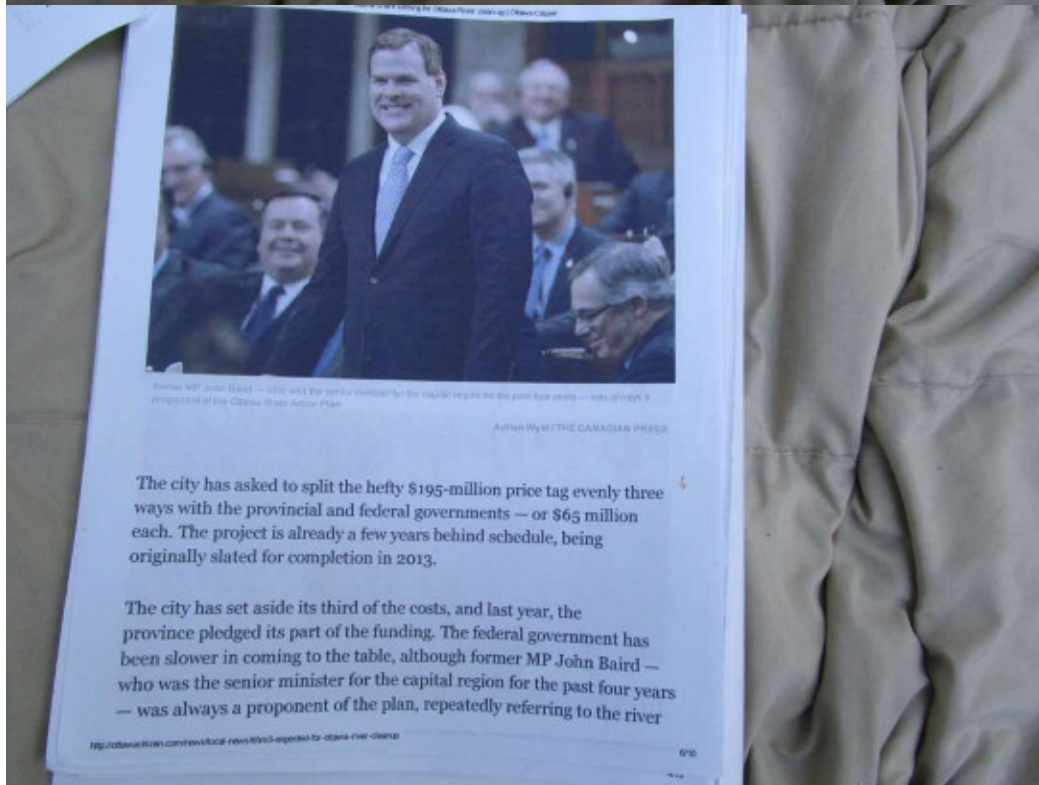
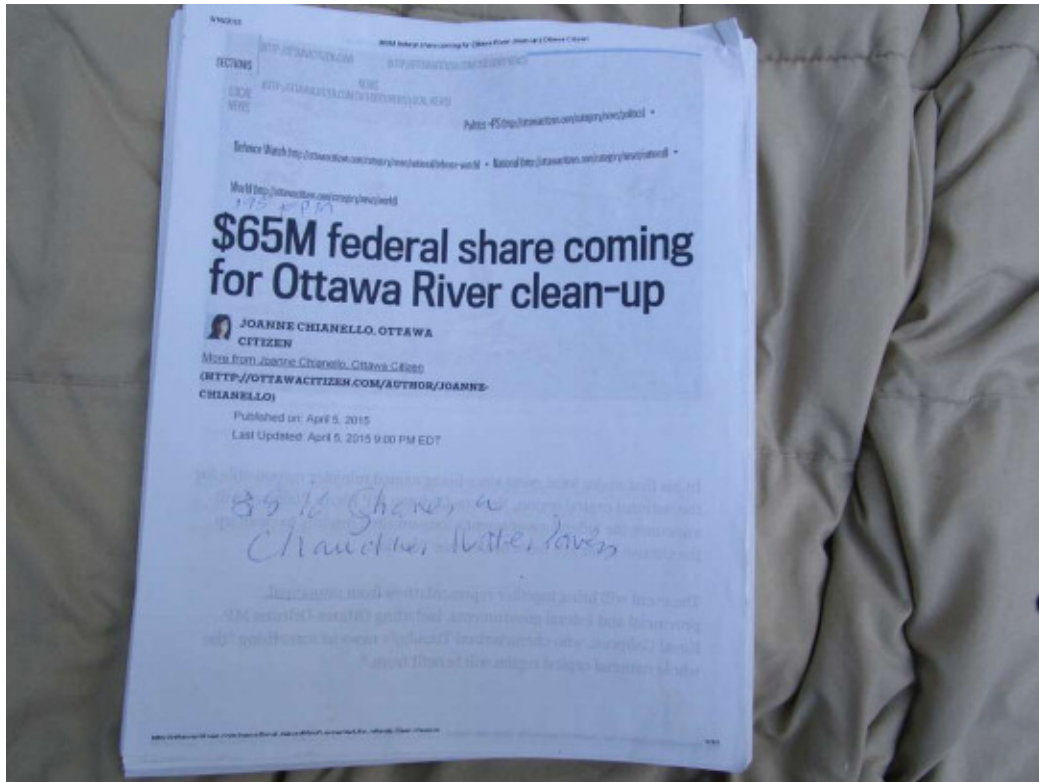
Several individuals did challenge the new privatization, condominium development and hydro damming plans of the Windmill Development/Domtar/NCC and others to the City of Ottawa, Ontario Municipal Board, and Ontario Superior Court. Extensive documentation is available on this yet unresolved challenge, including challenges of "land ownership", on our www.asinabka.com website.

In essence, in an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), several other people and I challenged the decision of the City of Ottawa to rezone

- i) what had always been an important sacred meeting space for Indigenous Peoples from time immemorial (partially evidenced by artifacts uncovered in 2014 in the region, dating back to 7,000 years ago) and
- ii) what remains a central historical site on national significance,

to permit privatization and condominium development.

Further, we challenged the veracity of the claim presented in 2012 by Windmill Developers that they were investing money to clean up the contamination of the Chaudiere Site. In fact, this photo of an April 2014 Citizen article affirms it was public knowledge that the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments were each investing \$60 million public funds in the cleanup of the Ottawa River.



We also challenged land ownership claims by Windmill Developers as a part of our OMB and Ontario Supreme Court appeal. Although Windmill presents itself as an independent developer that “owns” the Chaudiere and Albert Islands, in fact the presence of only Domtar lawyers in our

related post OMB/Ontario Supreme Court appeal hearings of 2016 belies the legitimacy of the claim. Here we were dismissed by that strange principle of declining jurisdiction in the Ontario Superior Court; nonetheless, Judge Hackland determined that the issue of public interest in the area was significant and relevant; and that more than the one group of Algonquins, the Algonquins of Ontario, with whom Windmill had forged a relationship, had a legitimate vested interest in the area.

It is public knowledge that Domtar operated a pulp mill on Chaudiere Island till 2007, that there was a massive fire on the site during the closure period, and that its operations contributed to extensive contamination in the area, including through direct deposit of effluents into the Ottawa River. The City of Ottawa recently (this past fall) approved funding to Windmill for river clean-up; in essence, the issues we raised and challenged through three appeal processes (City of Ottawa, OMB and Ontario Superior Court) have nonetheless concluded with the company responsible for the contamination of the area now recipient of public funds for “remedial” action.

There are many reasons why the actions of the NCC are also disingenuous, including with respect to “conflict of interest” Algonquin representation, and private land negotiations with Domtar. These are discussed extensively in our OMB appeal documentation, available publicly at www.asinabka.com. The damming of the Chaudiere Falls is a related controversial issue (this dating back to 2007), involving Energy Ottawa as well.

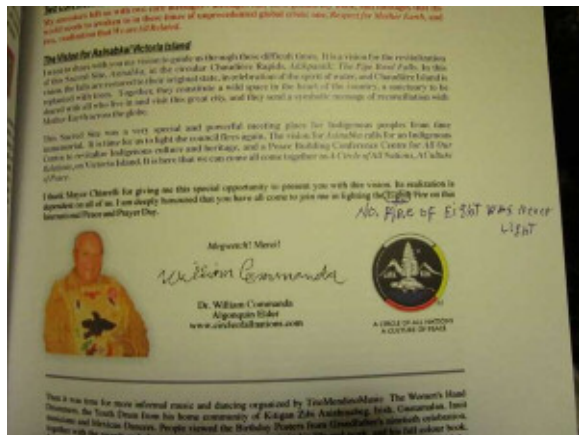
In this most publicly contested land issue in the National Capital Region, how is it legitimate that Jeff Westeinde is able to proceed with the planning he discusses with you, particularly in these times of Truth and Reconciliation and renewed relations with First Peoples?

Minister Bennett References Elder Commanda’s Vision in the Land Claim Discussion

It is interesting that Minister Carolyn Bennet mentions Elder William Commanda, his vision for the Chaudiere site, and the need for a vision for the region in your interview with her. Elder Commanda was Supreme Chief of the North American Indian Nations Government, the original Indigenous activist voice dating back to 1945; chief of his community for 20 years and well acquainted with Indian Affairs and federal politics; a superior historian and perceptive observer of contemporary global politics and issues, and a singular spiritual leader, prophecy carrier and visionary:

- i) he animated an action plan to address the critical relational problems he saw looming on the global stage with his *Circle of All Nations* peace building work, commencing this formally with an international inter-cultural gathering in 1967 (the time of Canada’s 150 celebrations);
- ii) he intervened at the 1990 United Nations Pre Rio Earth Summit in view of the escalating environmental challenges; and
- iii) he also developed and presented and advanced the comprehensive Asinabka blueprint to further his work at his ancestral heart land at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, that situated Indigenous Peoples and all others on a platform of inclusion and equality to build towards a sustainable global future.

Both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people and government officials engaged in the development of this vision of hope. However, by the end of his life he could see the recalcitrant spirit of neocolonialism still dominant his homeland, and in the end believed that real change would only come with the direct intervention of nature. (His hand written words after his formal speech upon receipt of the Key to the City of Ottawa in 2006 - [2006-06-21 William Commanda's Acceptance Speech Flyer - Key to the City of Ottawa](#), inscribed in our *Learning From A Kindergarten Dropout Book Two*, reveal his assessment of the reality before his death in 2011.



When stolen land is mentioned in the interview, echoes the sentiment of Richard Wright’s book *Stolen Continent*, which Elder Commanda read and marked with annotations. Elder Commanda, Carrier of the Sacred Three Figure Welcoming and Sharing Wampum Belt from the turn of the seventeenth century, affirmed the notion of sharing the land and its resources, consistent with the commitment of his ancestors. You note that Minister Bennett does not address the land claim issue. William Commanda did not engage in the “land claim” framing of the issues – he had nothing to claim; he was “at home” here, unlike all others. I also attach a document that shares his views and references the Asinabka/Chaudiere Sacred Site (Opening Remarks, National Claims Research Conference 2006).

Spiritual Connection with Land and Towards an Understanding of Sacred Sites

The interview also discusses the Chaudiere Site as sacred space, a place for prayer and reflection, and it is most interesting that when this happens in Zi-Ann’s interview, Crow caws in the background of your tape. Note our 2015 *Circle of All Nations* note on the *sacred site* rationale: [ASINABKA SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE: CANADA’S SINGULAR CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE.](#)

With the most recent decision of the NCC to shut down access to Victoria Island for seven years, Indigenous people no longer have any access to space for land-based prayer and ceremony in the National Capital Region, nor the opportunity to honour the land. In a colonized country dotted with buildings that mark the prominent presence of a variety of religions, is this not a national shame in this post UNDRIP day and age? Further, thousands of Non-Indigenous peoples as much as Indigenous were awakened to power the Sacred Chaudiere Site by Elder Commanda, as well as

to Indigenous prayer and ceremony, and they too still seek the manifestation of his vision for a place of inclusion, and not little Amsterdams, European malls, condo development and corporatization at this sacred historical heart of the country.

I attach a clip from a recent facebook page William Commanda Legacy Asinabka.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/clurfrgfgqny210/Screenshot%202019-01-26%2005.59.32.png?dl=0>

Today, at every turn the media talks about Nature as intervenor in our daily lives. Indeed, here in the National Capital Region, consistent with the messages of the Seven Fires Prophecy presented publicly extensively by Elder Commanda since 1987, we have seen the escalating disruptive face of Nature; we have had the unprecedented flooding of the Ottawa River; and we have had the devastating tornados; and since the tragic bus accident in a city overwhelmed with development and road construction, further unpredictability in the weather, and increasing fear on the roads. Indeed, on January 28, 2019, there was a 3.3 earthquake at Papineau Labelle, where the lake was formerly known as Commanda Lake, and where the oldest known occupant of land (1760) was William Commanda's own ancestral grandmother, Piwanokwe Commanda - it was her people who challenged the earliest invasive activity of the newcomers - the cutting of their sugar bushes at the Sacred Chaudiere Site by Philomen Wright in 1802, a challenge continued by William Commanda himself, in a unique, inclusive and transformative manner.

Daily too, our Circle of All Nations facebook pages show ongoing interest in William Commanda seven years after his death. There is a deep thirst for "business other than as usual." I have discussed my response to your podcast with William Commanda's nieces, Mary Daisy Commanda Jacko and Lillian Dowling who participated in the OMB appeal. William Commanda's daughter Evelyn Dewache also participated in the appeal. Elder Jacko, now 83, presently the person with the most direct ancestral links with the Sacred Chaudiere Site dating from 1760, adds that if the Indigenous vision of her uncle's is not manifested, she does not expect anything else will either; her father told her such a time of reckoning would come.

The Honour of the Crown

William Commanda was no small player in the National Capital Region. In fact, if you look at this photo, you will see this most esteemed Officer of the Order of Canada showing Her Majesty a Sovereign coin she had sent him the Chief of his Community, on the occasion of her Coronation in 1953, affirming the relationship grounded in sovereignty. We still await the *Honour of the Crown*, and Canadians at large are awakening to this realization. There will be no self-respect for us till this manifests – you can hear that in Minister Bennett's daily tears.



Thank you again for your podcast, which prompted this extensive reflection. I believe Elder Commanda would want his views and hard work to create an understanding of the nature and purpose of the Asinabka Chaudiere Sacred Site better understood, recognized and acknowledged, in the National Capital Region, Canada and beyond. For ease of reference to the overall work of the past seven years, note the 2016 Circle of All Nations Year End report on the Asinabka Sacred Chaudiere Site. [2016 ASINABKA YEAR END REPORT \(Includes 1998-2016 pointform recap\)](#).

There are of course, many more questionable activities that have impacted William Commanda's Legacy Vision of Hope, for the Asinabka Sacred Chaudiere Site. Perhaps you too will come to the conclusion that this file warrants further investigative journalism. If you have any suggestions for this, I would be most grateful.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Romola V. Thumbadoo
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Legacy Work of Elder William Commanda
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MARCEL BEAUDRY

Synopsis of Announcement in a Video Clip at Circle of All Nations Gathering in Maniwaki

In August 2008, at the annual *Circle of All Nations* International Gathering, NCC Chairman Marcel Beaudry affirmed that:

- NCC had been working a long time, perhaps 15 years, but intensely over the last 7, for Aboriginals to be recognized once and for all in the National Capital Region
- In Ontario, English culture predominates, and in Quebec, French, but NCC felt the Aboriginals did not have a place, and noted its role to facilitate this
- NCC wanted to recognize Aboriginals by building a centre of national stature
- NCC noted the area is sacred to Aboriginals
- Aboriginals themselves should decide what should take place there: healing, spirituality, education etc
- The Federal Government would invest \$100 million dollars on the building (*our note*: includes remedial environmental work), and \$11 million a year on programs and services
- Two Foundations would be established to implement the project: one to oversee construction and maintenance with 50% Federal and 50% Aboriginal control; the other under Aboriginal management for programs and services
- NCC noted that Aboriginals were here much earlier than the French and English, and moving forward on this project would finally see all three founding nations represented in the capital city
- NCC also acknowledged Elder Commanda's respected status across the country amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; and Douglas Cardinal's unique architectural vision, and long term commitment to the project
- (The sentiments expressed are consistent with the Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt, with Aboriginal Peoples assuming their rightful position and share within the capital - *our note*)



A REPORT ON THE VISION FOR THE ASINABKA NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CENTRE

A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS REPORT

PRESENTED BY
WILLIAM COMMANDA, OC
Algonquin Elder

FEBRUARY 14, 2010

Please note that this report primarily reflects the positions and perspectives developed and negotiated by Elder William Commanda, following years of consultation with Algonquins and others, but its release does not imply any official government endorsement of the project at this time.

www.asinabka.com
www.circleofallnations.ca
<http://web.mac.com/circleofallnations>
circleofallnations@sympatico.ca

Information on the Asinabka/Victoria Island/Chaudière Site
Archival Information on William Commanda's work
Information on recent general Circle of All Nations Work
Email
231 Pitobig Mikan, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, Maniwaki,
Quebec, J9E 3B1
506 Stratas Court, Kanata, Ontario, K2L 3K7
613-599-8385; 819-449-2668

DR. WILLIAM COMMANDA, ALGONQUIN ELDER

www.circleofallnations.com

OPENING REMARKS

NATIONAL CLAIMS RESEARCH CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 7, 2006

**I WOULD LIKE TO NOTE THAT IN 1532, FRANCIS
DI VITTORIA, THE PRIMARY PROFESSOR
SACRED THEOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY
SALAMANCA, GAVE TWO FAMOUS LECTURES
INDIS AND DE JURE BELLI (CLASSICS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW – E. ENYS. E
PUBLICATIONS New York, 1964.) IN 1933, THIS MAN WAS ACCLAI
THE FOUNDER OF MODERN INTERNATIONAL
AT THE SEVENTH PAN AMERICAN CONGRESS.**

**HE ASSERTED TO THE KING OF SPAIN (WHO
ALSO THE KING OF JERUSALEM AND EMPERO
THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE) THAT THE IND
WERE THE TRUE OWNERS OF THE LAND, F
BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE POINTS OF V
HOLDING IT IN HONOUR OF THE CREATOR; AN**