

August/September Correspondence Regarding the Vision for the Victoria Island Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Centre, sent to the Following Parties: The Prime Minister and Several Ministers; The Governor General and His Excellency; National Chief, Assembly of First Nations; Chairman, National Capital Commission

August 14, 2003

The Right Honourable Jean Chretien

Prime Minister's Office

Langevin Block

80 Wellington Street

Ottawa, K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Chretien:

Re: The Victoria Island Project

I am writing to request a meeting with you regarding plans to establish an Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island.

As you are aware, over the past decade, various proposals have been made regarding the establishment of an Aboriginal Centre on Victoria Island. However, since the turn of the century, as Algonquin peoples have become actively involved in developing a vision for this central location in their traditional meeting grounds, a concrete and fully inclusive blueprint has emerged,

- first as a healing centre for indigenous peoples, and a peace building reconciliation centre of national and potentially international pertinence,
- and second, in the unique indigenous conceptual designs developed by Douglas J. Cardinal, Architect.

My comprehensive vision for this Asinabka area sees the sacred Chaudiere Rapids flowing freely and its adjacent Chaudiere Island green with trees once more, a vital symbol of reconciliation with Mother Earth.

You may be aware that I carry three sacred wampum belts for the Anicinabe peoples. (Historically, indigenous peoples of the east recorded important agreements in such ceremonial artifacts and these were honoured and respected as sacred, spiritually based commitments). These ancient articles remain critical and relevant to the indigenous issues of these times, and are particularly pertinent to the Victoria Island Project, with respect to urgency, sharing and inter connection.

The Seven Fires Prophecy Belt from the fourteen hundreds describes this as the time for choice regarding healing our relations with Mother Earth and with each other, and the global reality confirms that these are the crucial issues of our times.

Victoria Island has been the spiritual meeting grounds of the Algonquin peoples for countless centuries, and in this year of the Jubilee, we see this land returning to the trust of the Algonquins. The Algonquin people are now actively developing plans for an indigenous centre designed to

- support the healing of indigenous peoples across the country (with particular reference to identity and self worth, language and culture, and relationship with Mother Earth)
- express and celebrate our diverse cultures and traditions, and
- enable a strengthened and proud indigenous people share our ideology with all others, nationally and internationally.

This island has always been a very significant Island of Council Fire for the indigenous peoples of North America, and it is our Algonquin homeland. The government and people of Canada must recognize this, and we must exercise our sacred trust and responsibility to the land and its peoples, consistent with the Seven Fires Prophecy.

It is now the proper moment to advance our individual and collective efforts in these areas. The vision for Victoria Island holds much promise for the healing of indigenous peoples, relationships with all others, and Mother Earth. We request your government's partnership in our quest for healing, reconciliation and peace building.

I understand that you too are very much interested to see our vision become a reality. In the Speech from the Throne, and further to my meetings with The Governor General and His Excellency, I see reason for hope for a better future for indigenous peoples as we evolve a new relationship together.

We are anxious to proceed swiftly with next steps. Time is very much of the essence to me as I approach my ninetieth year and I try to bring some of my goals and responsibilities to fruition, and I understand that similar pressures exist for you.

I would like very much to update you on our work on this initiative at your earliest convenience, and I earnestly seek your government's speedy endorsement of this work.

Megwetch for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William Commanda

Algonquin Elder

Attachments

P.S. I am also taking this opportunity to share with you correspondence I have addressed to Mr. Marcel Beaudry, Chairman, National Capital Commission regarding Douglas J. Cardinal work on this initiative.

cc Her Excellency, Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada

The Hon. Jean Augustine, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State
(Multiculturalism and Status of Women)

The Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, P.C., M.P., Secretary of State
(Children and Youth)

The Hon. Sheila Copps, P.C., M.P., Minister of Canadian Heritage

The Hon. Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Works and
Government Services, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-
Status Indians, Minister responsible for the Office of Indian
Residential School Resolution

The Hon Bill Graham, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs

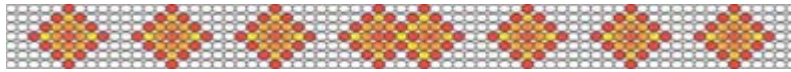
Mr. Rick Laliberte, M.P.

The Hon. John Manley, P.C., M.P. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister
of Finance

The Hon. Anne McLellan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health

The Hon. Robert Nault, P.C. M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development

The Hon. Lucienne Robillard, M.P., President of the Treasury
Board



August 25, 2003

Mr. Marcel Beaudry

Chairman, National Capital Commission

40 Elgin Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K1P 1C7

Dear Mr. Beaudry:

Re: Victoria Island Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Centre

Over the past year of our acquaintance, I believe I have been consistent in expressing to you my convictions regarding the establishment of an indigenous healing and peace building centre at Victoria Island, in which work I have been engaged independently over many years.

I am forwarding to you a copy of my correspondence to the Prime Minister on this matter. I am also forwarding a copy of the recent resolution made by

the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, of Golden Lake, Ontario, one of those communities more centrally concerned with this initiative.

From time to time, I am made aware of other ideas for the development of these ancient meeting grounds of my ancestors. However, I am convinced that it is now time for the vision of the indigenous peoples of this land to be entrenched, and I can see nothing but good for all the world emerging in the future from such a commitment.

I believe you have an important role to play in this process, and I pray you will be guided accordingly. I thank you for your support to date.

William Commanda

Algonquin Elder



August 14, 2003

Her Excellency, The Governor General, and His Excellency

1 Rideau Drive

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0A1

Your Excellencies:

Re: Victoria Island Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Centre Project

I have been honoured to present to you my thoughts regarding the establishment of an Aboriginal Healing Centre at Victoria Island, the spiritual meeting grounds of my Algonquin ancestors, on two occasions since the turn of the century, and I have been grateful for your interest and expression of support.

Despite the absence of any formal support, this work has been advanced; now a clear vision has emerged for an inclusive Indigenous Healing Centre and a Peace Building Centre of national and potentially international scope, to be realized under the guidance and leadership of the Algonquin peoples of this territory.

I am forwarding to you my report on this vision, as well as a one page synopsis of all the key components which read in accordance to the flow of the Sacred Medicine Wheel. I am also taking the opportunity to forward to you copies of my correspondence to the Prime Minister regarding this work, as well correspondence regarding architect Douglas J. Cardinal's involvement in this initiative.

As a North American indigenous person of this land who is firmly committed to an all inclusive Circle of All Nations and a Culture of Peace, I would like to commend you on your very impressive hard work over the past years in this evolving land. I would also like to say that we hold a special place for you in our hearts, in the context of your commitments, and with respect to the Honour of the Crown.

Sincerely,

William Commanda

Algonquin Elder



August 27, 2003

National Chief Phil Fontaine

Assembly of First Nations

1 Nicholas Street, 10th Floor

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7

Dear National Chief Fontaine:

Re: Victoria Island Healing and Peace Building Centre

First, may I congratulate you on your new position, responsibilities and challenges. I wish you very well in your work.

I have requested a formal meeting with you, to apprise you of the work I have been undertaking with respect to the establishment of an Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Center at Victoria Island, the traditional spiritual meeting grounds of the Algonquin peoples.

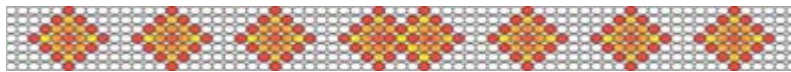
I am forwarding to you my report on this work, as well as copies of my correspondence on this matter to the Prime Minister. I am also including copies of resolutions recently made by the Algonquin First Nations of this area.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

William Commanda

Algonquin Elder



August 6, 2003

Mr. Marcel Beaudry

Chairman, National Capital Commission

12 th Floor, 40 Elgin Street

Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Mr. Beaudry:

Re: The Victoria Island Project and Douglas J. Cardinal Architect

Further to our recent meeting with Tom Lee and Norman Williams, working for National Capital Commission and Heritage Canada respectively, I am writing to express our grave concern regarding the possibility that the National Capital Commission might consider assigning the task of transforming the vision for the physical structure of the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island into concrete reality to any other than the Douglas J. Cardinal Architect firm.

We had believed that, following our meetings with you, the issue of tendering the project had been laid to rest with the understanding and agreement that Douglas Cardinal and I held the intellectual property rights to the comprehensive vision for Victoria Island, and that a Request for Proposals would not be required with this project.

Douglas Cardinal has been engaged with Aboriginal peoples and others to advance work to establish an Aboriginal Centre at this site for well over a decade. In May 2000, he and Her Excellency, the Governor General, both engaged in enthusiastic discussions on this topic at the Millennium Circle of All Nations Peace Gathering that I hosted at Nepean Point.

Over the ensuing years, he has accompanied me on long journeys to consult with remote Algonquin communities in Quebec and Ontario in order to develop the proper vision for the site. His preliminary conceptual designs, obviously expressive of sacred indigenous concepts, combined with the emerging vision for healing and unity, served to ensure support for the project amongst people themselves often living in considerable poverty and deprivation, and in desperate need of healing, strengthening and pride in their heritage.

As you are aware, Aboriginal peoples of the east recorded important agreements in ceremonial artifacts – wampum belts and strings - with the expectation that they would be honoured and respected as sacred, spiritually based commitments. I have said that the three sacred wampum belts that I carry for the Anicinabe people remain vital and relevant to the indigenous issues of these times, and are particularly pertinent to the Victoria Island Project: one a prophecy belt and the other two agreement belts.

In 1987, at the fourth conference on Aboriginal Issues hosted by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the Algonquin people shared messages of our sacred wampum belts for the first time. With reference to the Seven Fires Prophecy Belt, I stated that we believed that the fire would be relit in the west and then return to the east.

We see Douglas Cardinal, a westerner by birth, serving as a vehicle to bring that fire, life and hope back to indigenous peoples. In addition to his work on the Victoria Island project over the eighties and nineties, he has also been under apprenticeship with Elders across North America for over forty years. This special training as well as other ceremonial preparation has resulted in his creation of the special physical embodiment of the vision for Victoria Island.

Further, you will note that the three central themes that have found voice in the vision for Victoria Island include

- Healing, strengthening and unifying indigenous peoples;
- Healing individual and collective relationships with Mother Earth; and
- Healing relationships with all others.

Each of these themes impact in a particularly significant way in the life of Douglas Cardinal:

- An Aboriginal person of mixed heritage with its own burden of alienation, he himself and close members of his own family were also victims of racism and the residential school abuses, and he has had to struggle against tremendous odds both personally and professionally to express his indigenous voice;
- His world renowned architecture sets high standards for environmental compatibility. The Victoria Island plan respects the solstice lines, weather and climate patterns and historic configurations, and it is designed to serve as an exemplary representation of an environmentally impeccable structure worthy of national and international acclaim, most appropriate in the national capital region, and as well, a modern incarnation of the spirit of indigenous peoples as caretakers of Mother Earth; and
- His brilliant and uniquely indigenous architecture has earned him a wide national and international reputation and has served to teach countless peoples, both young and old a little about the aboriginal heart and mind, and as such, he stands as a significant Canadian leader. In fact, the Honourable Ms. Sheila Copps has commented favourably on the impressive nature of his work when compared with other structures across the country and the world.

In our minds, the ancient spiritual power of the land, visible even in a painting dating back to 1613, the healing vision and the symbolic architecture are intricately interconnected and Douglas Cardinal's execution of his vision is imperative to our support of the project.

Therefore we see it as unconscionably dishonourable, and consequently totally untenable, that he be subjected to a non indigenous interpretation of fairness with respect to any awarding of the contract for the Indigenous Centre at Victoria Island.

Neither would such a process be fair to Aboriginal peoples – why would they want anything less than that this Indigenous Centre, dedicated to their resumption of their rightful stature in this land of their ancestors, be completed by the visionary who conceived it?

We have worked hard to build consensus as we have developed an extraordinarily inclusive vision for Victoria Island, where all indigenous peoples, all Canadians, and indeed others can find a place, and it is our expectation that we go forward in the same positive, respectful spirit till this vision is fully actualized.

Sincerely,

William Commanda

Algonquin Elder

cc Her Excellency, Ms. Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada

The Right Hon. Prime Minister, Jean Chretien

The Hon. Sheila Copps, Minister, Canadian Heritage