

Murray Sinclair
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A4

Suzanne Keeptwo
(addressed removed)
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Dear Senator Sinclair,

June 2, 2106

Kwey kwey/bonjour/hello, and congratulations on the excellent, heartfelt work you and your team did as Commissioners of Truth and Reconciliation in this country. I trust your good mind, spirit, and heart will transfer to your work in the Senate on behalf of all Canadian and Indigenous peoples of this land.

I write to request that you graciously put your voice toward a growing momentum - and time sensitive issue - representative of what the truth about reconciliation can look like.

Currently, there is an increasing number of disgruntled, discouraged, and disappointed Algonquin (status, non-status and Métis), First Nation individuals and families (guests of the territory), citizens of Ottawa and Gatineau, church groups, student groups, unions, university clubs, activists, academics, environmentalists, civil servants, former councillors, and historians, etc. struggling to bring attention to what is presently an urgent matter. The issue of concern is occurring within a stone's throw of Parliament Hill at a place, long deemed Sacred, to the Mamiwinimoweg (a.k.a Algonkin), and referred to as Akikodjiiwan (a.k.a Chaudière Falls and Islands).

For thousands of years, Akikodjiiwan pulsed as Odawa - a Meeting Place - of many Nations. Perhaps your own ancestors held stories of Akikodjiiwan? In 1613, it was acknowledged by the newcomers as a traditional Sacred Site due to its natural phenomenon and configuration. Subsequently, this site - second only to Niagara Falls - was celebrated by colonial poets, painters, naturalists, and commissioners. The notion of bringing it back from industrialized use is historically documented and endorsed by many colonial "dignitaries".

Algonquin Elder William Commanda dedicated the last 30 years of his life to a Vision of retribution, not only for the Earth, Waters and nature's beings but to the ancestors and future generations of all peoples under the reclaimed stewardship of the traditional people of this area, the Algonquin.

The Asinabka Vision, supported by many, calls for a national park, historic interpretive & cultural centre, a peace-building meeting site and place for teaching, sharing, and wholistic healing. A previous federal government had commissioned well renown First Nations architect (and IRS survivor), Douglas Cardinal, to produce a plan for Asinabka as he, too, prophetically stood along the late, great Grandfather Commanda for many, many years in support of this environmental, cultural, and universal Vision.

Grandfather, and his Vision, had gained support from the City of Ottawa, and The National Capital Commission. But, after his journey to the Spirit World, Grandfather's Vision was quickly forgotten as the site was "sold" to the Windmill Development Group and Dream Unlimited Corp, a private developer. For this "sale" to be "official", the site had to be re-zoned by the city of Ottawa for development purposes.

In October 2014, more than 45 people — many Algonquin and diverse First Nation individuals — officially asked the city to preserve the lands as open space, invoking Algonquin Elder William Commanda's 30 year vision for the falls yet, the City of Ottawa Council approved rezoning this site from Parks & Open Space (as reinstated after the industrial use of it) to MIXED-USE URBAN DEVELOPMENT, meaning endorsing Windmill's plan of 1,200 condominium units, office towers and retail businesses.

Douglas Cardinal and five others paid the fees to appeal Council's decision to get a hearing at the Ontario Municipal Board to challenge the rezoning of the former industrial site, arguing that it is sacred to First Nations people. A section of the site is still being used as a traditional meeting place and place of ceremony. Susan Martin, a First Nations guest to traditional Algonquin territory - and mother of a murdered daughter - held ceremony on the site for one full year in honor of our murdered and missing loved ones. She broke her vigil just a couple of weeks ago. I have personally attended pipe ceremonies, water ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies, traditional wedding ceremonies, pow wows and various other gatherings over the years...including going there as a place for personal prayer when the pulse of the city becomes too much... First Nations master herbalist, Janice Longboat has spoken to me about a traditional way of *healing* the contaminated soil there - not just expensively relocating it - so it can actually breathe and become fertile again.

The conservative government established an Office of Religious Freedom in 2013. Our current Liberal government has just launched a renewed mandate for this office which is to champion the rights of indigenous peoples throughout the world. What are they doing for those in (quite literally) their own back yard? This newly revised initiative is meant to align with human rights promotion. The government of Canada states: Freedom of religion or belief, including the ability to worship in peace and security, is a universal human right. As you very well know, Senator, our traditional indigenous peoples are spiritually connected to the Earth Mother and her Blood Waters. We do not construct concrete to worship within yet, tragically, our Places of Worship are not understood or valued as anything other than revenue enterprises hence continue to disappear around us, affecting the well being of our long suffering people.

Meanwhile, as the appellants' process was held up by bureaucratic process, Windmill's sales centre opened and sold one hundred units in the first condominiums planned to be built on our Sacred Place of Worship. On May 26, 2016 it was reported that The Ontario Municipal Board dismissed the appeal over the Zibi development (an appropriated Algonquin name used to suggest consensus). How did the developers so confidently open a Sales Centre one year *prior* this decision?

82 year old, Douglas Cardinal, asked for an appeal in the courts, but last Thursday (May 26th) that failed when Judge Charles Hackland released a decision saying the OMB made no legal mistakes and that "it is not the Board's function to adjudicate issues of Aboriginal title, or to declare or recognize the lands in question as a sacred site to the Algonquins". Windmill Development says it is now free to start construction on Akikodjiwan after overcoming, what it sees as, the last obstacle to its "Zibi" Condo Development. (On a side note, The Ontario Municipal Board needs to be reformed according to Tom Mrakas, a councillor with the Town of Aurora who introduced a motion last January (2016) calling on the province to limit the scope of the OMB to matters of law and process. This is an ongoing process.)

Currently, 9 out of 10 (federally-recognized) Algonquin First Nations have registered their opposition to Windmill's project.

The chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (accounting for 43 communities) unanimously oppose the development.

In December 2015, The Assembly of First Nations voted to oppose the project.

In 2014, The Ontario Rivers Alliance requested this area "remain a natural park space where First Nations and the public can gather now and into the future".

I could continue to list a (growing) number of other groups that have voiced their opposition to this sacrilege that blatantly disregards our indigenous perspective, rights, and needs.

Algonquin Nation Secretariat (ANS) Chiefs are asserting the need for meetings with the National Capital Commission (NCC) in the matter of Akikodjiwan. They insist the NCC's Aboriginal Liaison, Mr. Rene Tenasco, whose wife is in business with Windmill Development, is in a conflict of interest and, "not be involved in our consultations with the NCC on any matter."

Traditional Grandmothers from the *one* (federally-recognized) Algonquin First Nation (Pikwakanagan) that seeks financial gain from Windmill Developers are uniting with "The Journey of Nishiyuu," Youth Walkers from northern QC to oppose this condo development. They have made a **CALL TO ALL NATIONS** to walk a Sacred Walk to Parliament Hill on **Friday, June 17, 2016** to demonstrate the need for an official response to diverse complaints and concerns.

The Walkers will naturally meet where we have always met when in Ottawa: at Asinabka Island (a.k.a. Victoria), from which First Nations woman, Audrey Redman, intent on entering ceremony on May 13th, was forcibly removed by the RCMP, under the direction of the NCC Aboriginal Liaison Officer mentioned above. It is obvious the Indians are no longer being "allowed" to gather since time immemorial on what is slated as the next phase of development albeit by the NCC.

I know The **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 11**, states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies [etc]".

On May 10, 2016 Minister Bennett said: "We are now a full supporter of the declaration, without qualification [...], Canada has a robust framework for the protection of Indigenous rights".

I know the National Capital Commission (NCC) is the federal Crown Corporation upon which the Sacred Place of Worship, Akikodjiwan (which includes "Victoria" Island) resides. The NCC is "dedicated to ensuring that Canada's Capital is a dynamic and inspiring source of pride for all Canadians and a legacy for generations to come." It also claims that "the NCC cares for and protects vital public places that are unique to our nation's symbolic, natural and cultural heritage."

In 2014, The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the Tsilhqot'in First Nation vs. British Columbia case that "consent" to land use – including town-building and hydroelectric development - was required in Canadian law. In other words, the crown has a duty to consult with Aboriginal title holders.

This is unceded Algonquin territory. There has never been a deed of sale between any parties, indigenous or otherwise.

The Falls and Islands are surrounded by institutions of national importance, including: The Canadian Museum of History, The National Gallery of Art, The Parliament of Canada, The Supreme Court of Canada, The National Library and Archives, The Canadian War Museum, The Assembly of First Nations, and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) yet, Ottawa does not have a national institution dedicated to, operated by, and for Canada's Indigenous people. Robert Page, Senior Fellow at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa suggests our city needs A National Museum of Indigenous Peoples, independent of the Canadian Museum of Canadian History which is *not* dedicated to contemporary life and culture of indigenous peoples of this country. He hopes "there will be a day when Canadians can learn in Ottawa as much about our indigenous

peoples as we might discover in Washington”, D.C., referring to their National Museum of the American Indian. Imagine, if Mr. Page were to be enlightened about Grandfather William’s Vision for a living Centre?

You, yourself, want the government to create a federally funded National Council for Indigenous People to serve as the guiding voice that leads the way toward reconciliation. Does not your vision compliment that of our late, great Elder Commanda’s?

I do not have to remind you, Senator, of the many Calls to Action of your Truth and Reconciliation Report that clearly align with the goals and objectives of the Asinabka Vision for Akikodjiwan, a Vision already planned and supported by many - indigenous and non-indigenous alike – for its natural, historical, anthropological, geographical, cultural, as well as, Sacred significance. I cannot help to think a gesture from our current government to endorse the Asinabka Vision would inspire many of our youth, providing the hope that currently evades them to the point of suicide.

What does all this mean when it comes to the struggle to save, reclaim, re-naturalize and reawaken Akikodjiwan? Do any of these documents, declarations, mandates, calls, laws, opinions or policies hold meaning? If it is not all Forked Tongue, it seems, dear Senator, our inclusive and collective needs and desires compliment the long term vision of Asinabka.

This issue, this controversy, this opportunity has gone far beyond the mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage and Public Services and Procurement Canada “for consideration”.

You see, Senator, as the cities of Gatineau and Ottawa are involved, the provinces of Québec and Ontario, the National Capital Commission, Windmill Developers, Hydro Ontario, the Assembly of First Nations, and all ten of the Algonquin (federally identified) First Nations, and the Algonquins of Ontario (non status), the citizens of Ontario, Quebec, and Canada, Indigenous visitors to, and residents of, this territory, Idle No More Youth, International Spiritual Elders and Traditional Leaders – all involved, it is time our prime minister gets involved.

The federal government has a responsibility.

Could you please ask the prime minister to implement a moratorium until a Talking Circle can be instituted to peacefully talk this out and come to consensus with all concerned parties? Or could you kindly let me know who has the ultimate authority, if not the prime minister of this country, to step in to do so?

A moratorium followed by a Talking Circle would be a significant motion to achieve some degree of Truth about how to Reconcile. The first step is for the imposed systems that be honor our ways of knowing and doing, including understanding how we worship. (Grandfather’s Vision embraces bringing understanding of Indigenous perspectives and environmental respect to settler communities.) Once we can get over that hurdle - and hear each other out - we may initiate a true path toward harmony and healing in a mutually respectful way – for the benefit of all. If this isn’t an opportunity for actual truths and reconciliation, I do not know what is. I hope this request for immediate and meaningful action will determine if our prime minister’s words are connected to his heart.

Please.

The Time is Now.

Grandfather William Commanda said “500 Years is a long time to wait.”

I will look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience to know you read my plea.

In great unity & spirit,

Suzanne Keptwo
Kitchisipirini kwe
Gatineau, QC

"So when any Canadian or international visitor comes to Ottawa, would they rather see a spectacular waterfall and a beautifully-green park, an Indigenous Centre and a place for peace, or a hydro dam and a private condo development? Which represents us better as a country? I'm just asking" Michel Marc Lacroix (Metis), documentary film maker.

cc: *Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations
Harry St. Denis, Wolf Lake First Nation
Jean Guy Whiteduck, Kitigan Zibi First Nation
Melanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage
Judy M. Foote, Minister of Public Services and Procurement
Mark Kristmanson, CEO, National Capital Commission
Russell Andrew Mills, Board of Directors, National Capital Commission
Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Energy (ON)
Jim Watson, Mayor of Ottawa
Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, Mayor of Gatineau
Paul Martin, Aboriginal Education Initiative
Jeff Westeinde, Windmill Development Group
Kirby Whiteduck, Pikwaganagan First Nation*