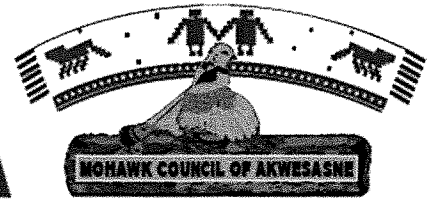


MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE

Sustaining our inherent rights, facing challenges together to build a strong and healthy future.



Office of the Grand Chief

Onerahtohko:wa/May 15, 2019

Zachary du Kamp
c/o Nathan Tidridge
Waterdown District High School
215 Parkside Drive
Waterdown, ON L8B 1B9

RE: MCA's view of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

Wa'tkwanonhweratons/Greetings,

Thank you for reaching out to our office Zachary, as your questions are welcomed and refreshing coming from a high school youth outside of our own community.

On behalf of our community of Akwesasne, I would like to point out that we must differ with your point about the British Crown having had an "excellent" relationship with Indigenous people, because during their reign the British Crown were exploiting our land, our people, as well as imposing a colonial system on all Indigenous people for the Crown's benefit and not ours as Indigenous people. I would be amiss as a First Nations leader if I did not give you the best possible information possible in order to assist you in your learning journey on Indigenous Studies.

Both Canada and the U.S. continued with this colonial practice by establishing Reserves, Residential Schools, various laws and regulations to limit and sometimes extinguish our rights as established nations. The Indian Act is a prime example of how the Canadian government attempted to enforce colonial rules upon us as well as force assimilation onto our indigenous peoples, resulting in intergenerational trauma, loss of language and culture, as well as a multiplicity of mental, spiritual and physical health problems that we continue to battle today.

It would be an excellent opportunity for you to also do some research on the "Doctrine of Discovery" and "Terra Nullius" and how these documents relate to indigenous peoples. Much of the problems that we face today are caused by the forced assimilation and laws that demanded First Nations and Indigenous peoples to comply with Canada's form of rule.

In short, the Doctrine of Discovery stems from a series of Papal Bulls (formal statements from the Pope) and extensions, originating in the 1400's. Discovery was used as a legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations, including First Nations in what is now known as Canada. During this period of discovery, also known as the European "Age of Discovery", Christian explorers would venture out to "claim" lands for their monarchs who felt they could exploit the land. Because of this, millions of Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their traditional lands and territories for other people under the Monarch would claim dominion on people and lands.

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The 10 Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous People are an acknowledgement that the Crown was wrong and Canada attempts to correct these wrongs through the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) into ministerial policies and through the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's recommendations. However meaningful these attempts are intended to be, it is a hard-pressed issue for First Nations and Indigenous people in Canada to believe in them while there is no real action nor attempts to include us in this process while expecting our full and absolute acceptance and participation. We believe and continue to press upon federal representatives that First Nations and Indigenous people must be a part of this process from the start, not as a final thought for inclusion.

More often than not we are left to be the last group to be consulted. This is clear in regards to the Canadian Government's announcement of the Recognition of Indigenous Rights Framework which completely lacked any indigenous consultation or input in how this framework would affect First Nations and Indigenous peoples across Canada. As a result, Minister Bennett announced on May 2nd, 2019 that this process would stop and the Canadian Government would take more time to complete this process correctly, as well as make room for a process "that is led by First Nations rights and treaty holders to co-develop rights-based policies that can replace the comprehensive land claims policy and inherent right policies." (APTN National News, May 2, 2019)

In regards to the United States, our First Nations brothers and sisters have suffered much of the same experiences that we have here in Canada. If you are familiar with our community of Akwesasne, we are split by the U.S./Canada border which divides Akwesasne into two jurisdictions. The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, which governs the U.S. portion of Akwesasne, and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne which governs the Canadian portion of Akwesasne. As a community though, we stand in solidarity with one another as we continue to battle both governments for the rights and recognition that was wrongfully taken from us by both Canada and the United States governments. Inclusive to our elected leadership is the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs who assert traditional governance and sovereignty on an international level in forums such as the United Nations. As a collective in Akwesasne we work together to advance the community of Akwesasne and our sister communities.

The U.S. also has a vast history with its Native American and Indigenous inhabitants, much like Canada, and has also made attempts to reconcile with them throughout these past years. However, Canada has made much stronger statements in support of the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous People and more recently with the Ministers of Indigenous Services and Crown Indigenous Relations having made more formal moves towards the implementation of the UNDRIP into their policies. With this said, we do feel that there is much more room for action and improvement upon their previous statements and "commitments" to First Nation and Indigenous people. The U.S. has not made such commitments despite having endorsed it under the Obama Administration, nor do we expect them with the current climate of their government to make anything further to this endorsement.

As a border community, we see the prevalently the lack of support by both federal governments to the First Nation/Native American/Indigenous peoples as many of our communities throughout the

U.S. and Canada live in Third World Country conditions, lack safe drinking water, food security, adequate housing, and extremely low quality and care for infrastructure as well as an extremely high youth suicide rates due to these low living conditions, among many others.

I hope this letter offers you some further insight to the many issues and concerns that we as First Nations and Indigenous Peoples face today, as well as the intricate and devastating history that we have resiliently endured. The First Nation and Indigenous people of this continent are resilient and continue to push for our rights and recognition of our inherent rights to this land. I thank you for your time and interest in our history and current political conditions.

Should you require further information, please feel free to contact me at Mohawk Government 613.575.2348.

Skén:nen/Peace,

MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abram Benedict', written in a cursive style.

Abram Benedict
Grand Chief

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of
Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007
< <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html> >

The Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. UN
Report 2014
< <http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/country-reports/the-situation-of-indigenous-peoples-in-canada>>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports and Calls
to Action 2015
< <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>>