

Wulustuk Times

Wulustuk - Indigenous name for St John River

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**Late Chief Noah Augustine (1971-2010)
Metepenagiag, NB**

Wulustuk Times:

Each month we gather and publish the latest, most current and relevant native information for our readers. Proceeding with this concept, we feel that a well informed person is better able to see, relate with, and assess a situation more accurately when equipped with the right tools. Our aim is to provide the precise tools and the best information possible.

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CANADA ENDORSES UN DECLARATION ON INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The federal government has endorsed a United Nations declaration that recognizes global human rights standards for indigenous populations, reversing its initial opposition to the document.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), a non-binding document, recognizes indigenous people's basic human rights and rights to self-determination, language, equality and land, among other rights.

Canada was one of four countries, along with Australia, New Zealand and the U.S., to vote against the declaration when it was adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007. Australia and New Zealand have since reversed their stance, and the U.S. has said it will review its position.

At the time the declaration was passed, the Harper government had expressed concerns about its wording on provisions addressing land and natural resources, saying it was overly broad and could lead to the reopening of previously settled land claims.

In its March speech from the throne, the government indicated it wanted to "take steps to endorse this inspirational document in a manner fully consistent with Canada's Constitution and laws."

But on Friday, the government released a statement saying it has formally endorsed the declaration.

On the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website, it stated that: "after careful and thoughtful consideration, Canada has concluded that it is better to endorse the UNDRIP while explaining its concerns, rather than simply rejecting the overall document.

"Although the UNDRIP does not reflect customary international law or change Canadian laws, Canada believes that the UNDRIP has the potential to contribute positively to the promotion and respect of the rights of indigenous peoples around the world."

In a statement, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo praised Canada's endorsement of the document as a positive development.

"Today marks an important shift in our relationship, and now, the real work begins," he said. "Now is our time to work together towards a new era of fairness and justice for First Nations and a stronger Canada for all Canadians, guided by the Declaration's core principles of respect, partnership and reconciliation."

BC ABORIGINAL ACTIVIST TO FILE COMPLAINT AGAINST CANADA AT UN

Postmedia News

A Canadian Aboriginal woman has announced she will file a complaint against Canada at the United Nations claiming discrimination under the Indian Act.

B.C. activist Sharon McIvor said in a release on Friday that Canada continues to discriminate against Aboriginal women and their descendants when determining eligibility for registration as a status Indian.

Ms. McIvor fought a 25-year battle against the federal government to have her children registered as status Indians.

Earlier this year, the Department of Indian Affairs moved to amend the act after a British Columbia court last year ruled it was unconstitutional to treat women and men differently when it comes to registering as status Indians.

"Versions of the Indian act, going back to the 19th century, have given preference to male Indians as transmitters of status, and to descendants of male Indians. Despite amendments made to the Indian Act when the Charter (of Rights and Freedoms) came into effect in 1985, Aboriginal women are still not treated equally as transmitters of status, and many thousands of descendants of Aboriginal women are denied status as a result," Ms. McIvor said in a release on Friday.

"I contested this discrimination under the charter. It took 20 years in Canadian courts, and I achieved only partial success. Now I will seek full justice for Aboriginal women under international human rights law. Canada needs to be held to account for its intransigence in refusing to completely eliminate sex discrimination from the Indian Act and for decades of delay."

Proposed changes to the Indian Act announced in March said grandchildren of First

Nations women who married non-First Nations men will be recognized as status Indians under the act. Before that, the act ruled only grandchildren of First Nations men who marry non-First Nations women would retain status.

Ms. McIvor says changes will provide only a partial and inadequate solution to the sex discrimination.

“Bill C-3 will make some female line descendants newly eligible for status, but they will still have a lesser ability to transmit status than their male line counterparts. In addition, Bill C-3 will still exclude many descendants of Indian women who were unmarried. As long as these Aboriginal women and their descendants continue to be ineligible for registration as Indians, sex discrimination will remain an entrenched characteristic of the Indian Act,” McIvor said.

She said that because of this she will take her case to the United Nations.

“Many people in Canada, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, recognize that this long-standing discrimination against Aboriginal women and their descendants is wrong and should end,” said Ms. McIvor.

In a letter to Parliament in May, Ms. McIvor said: “My own struggle has taken 20 years. Before me, Mary Two-Axe Early, Jeanette Corbiere Lavell, Yvonne Bedard, and Sandra Lovelace all fought to end sex discrimination against Aboriginal women in the status registration provisions in the Indian Act. It has been about 50 years now. Surely this is long enough.”

Ms. McIvor began her action to challenge sex discrimination in the registration provisions of the act because she said as a woman, she was not treated the same as a man as a transmitter of status, and, as a result, her children and grandchildren were ineligible for registered status.

NOAH AUGUSTINE LEAVES LEGACY OF ACTIVISM

METEPENAGIAG - He was a dedicated activist, a gifted speaker, a savvy businessman, a soulful poet and an avid defender and promoter of his people.

Noah Augustine was all of these things and much, much more over the course of his 39 years of life; a promising life that ended on Saturday night after his pickup truck careened off Highway 420 in his home of Metepenagiag First Nation, and down a steep embankment.

The RCMP believe that alcohol, excessive speed and failure to wear a seatbelt contributed to the former chief's death just after 10 p.m.

Dallas Augustine, the 28-year-old man who was identified as the lone passenger in the vehicle, continues to recover from non-life-threatening injuries at Miramichi Regional Hospital, Const. Eric Anderson told media yesterday.

Police declined to confirm the nature of the relationship between the two men.

Meanwhile, Augustine's community continues to privately mourn the loss of a man who, though a divisive figure at times, worked tirelessly on behalf of aboriginal people not only in Metepenagiag but across this country.

Longtime friend and former Liberal cabinet minister T.J. Burke, who worked with Augustine on several files, was also in the community yesterday expressing sympathy to the family.

Augustine burst onto the scene in the late 1990s as a young man who became the fiery voice of the native logging rights dispute, unafraid to confront government over its policies and steadfast in his defence of what he viewed to be fair and just.

But even prior to this very public chapter of his life, Augustine at an even younger age crusaded to change the status quo in his community; going to great lengths to better the lives of its residents.

In 1994, while in his early twenties, Augustine went against the grain and "grabbed the bull by the horns," as he put it back then, to fight back against the rampant prescription drug abuse that had been plaguing Metepenagiag, then known as Red Bank, as well as other reservations across the province.

Armed with a pen, paper and the charisma that would become a hallmark of his career, Augustine went door-to-door, conducting interviews in 115 Metepenagiag households, or 90 per cent of the population, to get to the bottom of the problem.

His research uncovered figures which showed that some 68 per cent of respondents felt prescription drugs such were the most prominent and readily-available drugs in the community.

The fallout from his investigation rubbed some people, mainly drug dealers and pushers, the wrong way and soon Augustine found himself the target of threats but, undeterred, he ran for chief for the first time later that year only to lose by three votes.

"That was really tough. My family felt so badly for me and I'd given up everything to run because I loved my people and believed in myself and the community," he said at the time.

"But I really believe that events like that, as traumatic as they are, are meant to happen so that you'll learn something. I've learned my greatest lessons in life during the worst times."

Fearing for his safety due to the continuing threats, Augustine left the community and headed to Fredericton where he accepted a position designing and marketing native tourism sites for the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

This would prove to be a career choice that would lead to one of his shining moments during his time as chief of Metepenagiag over the past six years, until he was ousted in an election held last spring.

The Metepenagiag Heritage Park honours 3,000 years of rich Mi'kmaq history and has become a point of pride in this scenic community, located at the juncture of the Northwest and Little Southwest Miramichi Rivers.

Augustine oversaw the project from the outset and spoke proudly of what the heritage park, now a flourishing tourism mainstay in Metepenagiag, meant to his people when it opened in 2007.

"I was basically taught that my ancestors were savages in the way of development and I never learned through the education system how proud I should be as a Mi'kmaq and the rich heritage that we have," he said.

"So for the kids today to come in here, they'll be bringing their friends in here and they will be our little ambassadors.

"That in itself will create a new level of confidence amongst our younger generations and in order to have a strong nation you need to have confidence."

Augustine was also renowned as one of the nation's foremost suicide prevention instructors, travelling across Canada conducting seminars for RCMP officials and even inmates behind the walls of the Atlantic Institution in Renous.

During the height of the native logging rights issue, Augustine gained a certain amount of notoriety in September 1998, when he shot and killed Bruce Barnaby in nearby Eel Ground First Nation.

Augustine subsequently fled along with another man to Jacksonville, Fla., where they later turned themselves in to authorities.

Expressing deep regret, and telling the court that he shot Barnaby in self-defence, Augustine was eventually acquitted of the charges by a jury.

From there, Augustine was a key advisor to leaders in Esgenoopetitj First Nation during the heated native fishing dispute, was elected chief of Metepenagiag in 2004 at the age of 33, and became deeply involved with a number of aboriginal economic, social and political initiatives over the past several years.

He was president of the Union of New Brunswick Indians and co-chair of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, worked on countless land claim files, and co-founded the First Nations and Business Liaison Group that pushed for partnerships between aboriginal entities and the public and private sectors.

A dedicated and talented writer, Augustine wrote often about his own life, his family and his experiences, in both poetry and prose.

His written words provide a window into a bright, educated, and passionate man who also battled, like many people, his fair share of struggles and personal insecurities.

In an essay he penned several years ago, Augustine remarks about coming to grips with his own identity as an aboriginal, and ultimately learning to accept and embrace that identity over time.

"My skin colour was lighter than most, causing conflict both within myself and on the streets. I was often referred to as 'honky' on reserve and 'injun' off reserve. I learned to fight to survive," he wrote.

"As a teenager I quickly learned that I had a label attached to my identity. My last name and place of residence often determined the scope of my social activities. I was ashamed to be Indian."

"Today I give thanks to the Creator for the battles he has let me fight and for the understanding he has put into my heart.

"The child of a burning legacy fights on and still dreams of the battle. And tomorrow is another day," he continued.

Last May, Augustine was voted out as chief of Metepenagiag in the most recent band election, losing to current chief Freeman Ward by 14 votes.

News of the defeat came as a relative surprise to many in and around the community. However, it was clear that Augustine's support wasn't as overwhelming as many thought it to be.

At the time, band councillor Patrick Ward explained why he believed Metepenagiag residents chose to go in a different direction.

"Definitely it was time for a change," he said. "Too many big ideas going nowhere ... he never followed through."

Freeman Ward, nor anybody at the band office, was available to comment on Augustine's death yesterday. However, upon his election, Ward expressed gratitude for all that Augustine had done for this community.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank outgoing Chief Noah Augustine for his commitment to Metepenagiag First Nation over the past several years," he said.

"He worked hard to ensure that economic development, growth and prosperity came to our First Nation, and I will work equally as hard to ensure the same."

If you log onto Metepenagiag's website, visitors are still greeted by the thoughtfully crafted words of Noah Augustine.

True to his commitment and ever the gifted pitchman, Augustine's words make you want to set a course for the Village of Thirty Centuries, the place Where Spirit Lives:

"The People of the Dawn invite you to visit our community, meet the friendly people and enjoy a genuine heritage-related experience as you learn about the 'Keepers of the Eastern Door'," he writes.

"Emset Nogamag. All my relations. Chief Noah Augustine."

FROM ROOTS CAME GROWTH

SCHENECTADY -- This was no ordinary midlife crisis.

In his late 40s, Jonathan "Jon" Paul's search for his father took him to several states and into a heightened state of mind when he discovered the man's -- and his own -- Native American roots.

"It's changed my whole thinking and outlook on how I see human beings because now I'm thinking the way Native Americans think," said the Schenectady resident, who now considers himself part of the Mi'kmaq reserve in Red Bank in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. "I'm thinking differently now than I ever did in my entire life."

Paul, now 63, remembers the deep spiritual connection he felt to the place and people during his first visit to Red Bank in 1995. It's where his father, Joseph Peter Paul, was reared before being recruited as a young man to New York by an Adirondack-area logging company.

"They started giving me insight about who I was, and that opened me," he said of his Canadian relatives. "It completed my journey and it was like I found a whole new family."

Jonathan Paul, who was raised in Dolgeville in Herkimer County with his twin brother, Jerome, recalls living a normal childhood.

But he always felt different.

He recalled the time a high school buddy teasingly called him "half-breed," a disparaging term for a biracial person. In the small village, there was speculation about his father, an outsider who didn't look like others in the community.

Jonathan Paul said he shrugged off the slur, unsure if his friend was being derogatory, kidding around or knew something that he didn't know.

When the brothers were teens, Jonathan Paul said their mother, Jean Helen Darrow Paul, revealed to them for the first time that their father was Native American.

The two brothers didn't know what to make of the information at the time. But Paul tucked it away, along with that feeling that he was different.

But as he got older, Paul said he "wanted to have that opportunity to call somebody dad."

He knew that after his parents split up, his dad was imprisoned in Maine for stealing a car belonging to his father-in-law, who also served as the police chief in Dolgeville. As a result, his father-in-law threatened to shoot Joseph Paul if he returned to the community. In essence, Joseph Paul was banned from seeing the boys.

Those prison records and divorce papers led Jonathan Paul to his father and his Native American relatives.

From prison, Joseph Paul had traveled to New York City to join his sisters.

A month before turning 50, Jonathan Paul found his ailing father living in squalor in a Manhattan apartment. He would eventually bring him back to the Capital Region to live out his life. His father died in 2007 at age 82.

In that time, the twin brothers took their father back to Red Bank where he was welcomed home by the locals.

For Jonathan Paul, the visit to Canada gave more meaning to his life than he had ever felt in the 30 years he worked for General Electric as a janitor and then a technician in the instrument shop.

"I never liked it (working at GE) because I wanted to be the artist," he said.

At the reserve, he met his relatives and they went through photos, many of which he'd come across already in his search for his father. While there, he reluctantly agreed to an invitation to participate in a powwow, which included drumming.

"It came so natural," he said. "I feel I'm with the people."

His cousin Elaine Paul, 60, who Paul stays with when he visits Red Bank, was there that day. She said she knew right away that he was one of them "because of his traditional native look. Plus, he looks like a Peter Paul (the family name)."

She said Jonathan Paul not only closely resembles two of her brothers, but also shares their passion for painting.

"He is a very curious guy, always wanting to know stuff," she said. "He just loves his culture."

After that first visit, he returned several times to learn more about his heritage. He continues his quest to find out more about the Mi'kmaq and practices some of the rituals.

Paul, a small man with a broad face, sports a feather in his cap. He adopted the name Ten Feathers after plucking 10 feathers from a dead hawk on a road near Amsterdam and has what he describes as a small "sacred pouch" slung around his neck. He has

used the pouch to store some of his mother's and father's ashes, and also carries cedar, sage, tobacco and spearmint -- which to him represent the four cardinal directions of north, south, east and west. Jonathan Paul took advantage of the free education he was entitled to as a Native American by going back to college at the age of 48, which helped him refocus on his passion for art. He graduated from University of Maine Orono with degrees in studio art and art education at 57.

His paintings are a combination of cubism, surrealism and allusions inspired by the Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali and M.C. Escher.

With the degree, Paul finally achieved another goal of being an art instructor. He teaches adult education classes in landscapes and creative acrylic at Schenectady and Niskayuna High Schools.

His next goal: to make a difference on the reserve. He's identified substance abuse and addiction as major problems there. In the future, Paul said he would like to live part of the year in Red Bank. His children, Jonathan Jr. and Brianna, were both affected by their father's discovery, and Jonathan Jr. plans to follow his father to Red Bank to help his people.

Brianna said her time with relatives taught her about racial and ethnic tolerance while helping her attain a higher spiritual and religious plane. As for her father, she said "he feels like he's somebody with a background and past."

Paul says he spent the first half of his life living as a white man. He plans to live it out as a Native American.

"Once I found out who I was, I lived that life. Now I'm in a new life and I want to live this life totally different than when I lived that other life," he said.

Paul Nelson can be reached at 454-5347 or by email at pnelson@timesunion.com

The Metepenagiag (Red Bank) First Nation is a community of just over 500 inhabitants located along Canada's Miramichi River, famous for its Atlantic salmon fishing. Red Bank is governed by Chief Freeman Ward and five council members, said George Ginnish, chief of neighboring Eel Ground First Nation, which is roughly a 10-minute drive away. The area is about two hours away from the capital city of Fredericton, New Brunswick.

There are alternate spellings of Mi'kmaq, including Micmac, Mikmaq and Mi'kmaw.

CREE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE SHOWS PROMISE IN TREATING DIABETES

U de M research shows medical value of herbs used by Cree healers

Back in the '90s, Kathleen Wootton looked around her hometown and grew concerned.

"Diabetes reached epidemic proportions in Cree communities," said Wootton, former

deputy chief of the town of Mistissini, in northern Quebec. "Some had limbs amputated, some lost their eyesight. It has a tremendous impact on a person's well-being."

The rates of diabetes among the Cree is three to five times the national average, affecting about 20 per cent of the population.

Over the ages, a harsh climate made the Cree genetically predisposed to energy efficiency. Their traditional diet consisted of wild game, fish and sea mammals, supplemented by forest plants and berries. To survive, their ancestors made minimal calories go a long way.

Consequently, the modern diet has taken a toll on the Cree, who experience high rates of obesity, which is a precursor to diabetes. Making matters worse, vehicles and motorboats have long replaced snowshoes and canoes as the preferred mode of transportation, resulting in less physical activity.

But a study released on Friday is the latest in a series of articles that suggest Cree elders may have had part of the solution all along.

Led by Dr. Pierre Haddad, a senior pharmacologist at Université de Montréal, the Canadian Institute of Health Research Team in Aboriginal Antidiabetic Medicines is testing the efficacy of traditional medicinal plants in treating diabetes.

In a paper released late last week, scientists asked Cree healers in four communities which plants they recommend to relieve symptoms associated with diabetes, like quivering hands or sores that won't heal. The team gathered samples of seventeen plants of interest. The list was later whittled down to four plants, one of which, rhododendron tomentosum, or Small Labrador tea, showed tremendous promise.

In both cells and rats, Small Labrador tea appears to inhibit the absorption of blood sugar, or glucose. Diabetics suffer from extreme spikes in glucose. The study's results indicate that when taken at mealtime, rhododendron tomentosum may help slow this dangerous effect of the disease.

Dr. Jun-Li Liu is an associate professor of medicine and diabetes researcher at McGill University. He called the study "an interesting lead," warranting further research. But he cautioned that it will likely take 10-20 years before scientists can draw firm conclusions about the plant.

Haddad said this may be the most extensive study of Small Labrador tea yet. While others have studied traditional use of the plant and the symptoms it treated, they were the first to make the connection to its potential to treat diabetes.

The results, however, didn't surprise the elders, according to Wootton.

"It's become a validation that traditional medicines work," he said.

Dr. Haddad also agreed that their research extends from a long heritage of

experimentation.

"We're very strict, with our titles and language, on making a link with traditional medicine," said Haddad, adding that it took a while to gain the community's trust. "We had to prove that there's no pharmaceutical company lurking in the background."

Aboriginals worldwide have been victims of biopiracy. Rogue researchers plug native peoples about traditional remedies, then profit from their 'discoveries.' To prevent this from happening, the Cree Nation insisted on a stringent research agreement, which may set a precedent in Canada.

The team's work has been guided by a committee of elders, who review anything the researchers publish to ensure their traditional knowledge is treated respectfully.

"It's a whole process. There's been times when three months dragged on to a year," said Haddad. "For example, if you tried to contact anyone last month, tough luck. It was moose break and everyone was out hunting. You have to respect that, live with it, and not ask for anything you need rapidly."

MAHARISHI'S GLOBAL FAMILY CHAT PRESENTED AT AFN - OTTAWA

November 15, 2010

Raja John Hagelin gave a brilliant keynote address at the November 3 Symposium in Ottawa, titled: "Pathways to Global Health through Indigenous Knowledge: First Nations as Custodians of Natural Law in Restoring Healthy, Sustainable First Nations Communities".

The Symposium, hosted by the Assembly of First Nations of Canada, was part of the 3-day 17th Annual Canadian Conference on Global Health. The conference was sponsored by the University of Ottawa, and attended by 450 delegates from 40 countries, representing agencies such as Doctors Without Borders, The World Health Organization, Oxfam, UNICEF, Pan American Health Organizations, the International Red Cross, and United Nations Health agencies.

Raja Paul noted that the theme of Raja Hagelin's address at the Symposium – the connection to Natural Law within to bring fulfillment to every cultural tradition – was deeply appreciated by the First Nations leaders.

Many of the First Nations leaders at the event from all over Canada and the United States met each other for the first time at the event, and those who had attended the Native American conference at Maharishi University of Management last year, and learned to meditate as a result, built on the success of that conference in their presentations at the Symposium.

Raja Hagelin presented the highlights of his keynote address from the Symposium, noting that indigenous wisdom is emerging as a valid scientific principle of vital importance for health. Referring to the First Nations speakers who had spoken prior to

him in the symposium, Dr. Hagelin said, "What we have understood today is that the origin of Natural Law is not 'out there,' but rather, the fundamental origin of Natural Law is within, at the very core of everyone, and at the very core of everything. The universe is superficially diverse, but unified at its core.

Dr. Hagelin lauded a concept paper entitled, "Turtle Island Foundation", recently developed by the First Nations and Native American leaders in cooperation with the Global Country of World Peace.

The Introduction to the Turtle Island Foundation Plan reads:

"Since time immemorial, First Nations peoples, as Custodians of Natural Law, have carried out their roles and responsibilities to maintain harmony and balance on "Turtle Island" (North America), and have enlivened Natural Law through their cultural traditions, languages and ceremonies. The Natural Law-based approach as described in the age-old indigenous Vedic system of knowledge, refers to the home of all the Laws of Nature, the most fundamental level of Nature's Intelligence that is expressing itself in the whole of creation-a worldview that deeply resonates with First Nations teachings.

"The indigenous knowledge from the Vedic tradition, revived in its wholeness by Vedic Scholar Maharishi Mahesh Yogi over the past 50 years, expounds a simple, universal message common to other traditions: enlivening one's inner connection to the source of Natural Law-the source of Nature's intelligence-lays the foundation for a life of health and well-being in tune with natural Law, wherein the individual accomplishes his/her own goals while contributing fully to the goals of the entire community."

The Turtle Island Foundation plan builds on the five-point plan presented at the Maharishi University of Management's September 2009 Native American Conference. The Turtle Island plan focuses on restoring strength to First Nations communities across North America by means of:

Education to develop the innate potential of the brain;
Health programs incorporating indigenous medicinal herbs and Transcendental Meditation;
Economic self-sufficiency through programs of sustainable energy and organic farming;
Cultural restoration and preservation, including the safeguarding of indigenous languages;
Sufficient land recovery to sustain First Nations and Native American traditional culture and economic self-sufficiency.

Dr Christopher Collrin, Director of First Nations Programs for the Global Country of World Peace, Canada, commented on the great appreciation expressed by each of the First Nations speakers at the Symposium for Maharishi's programs of Natural Law, including Transcendental Meditation and the TM-Sidhi Program, and the resulting coherence and harmony in the collective consciousness for addressing the endemic problem of violence in many First Nations communities. He went on to describe the exciting initiatives and the practical successes of the First Nations leaders.

Dr. Collrin quoted from a report by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, from

November 12, one week after the Symposium:

“The federal government has endorsed a United Nations declaration that recognizes global human rights standards for indigenous populations, reversing its initial opposition to the document”.

“In a statement, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo praised Canada’s endorsement of the document as a positive development: ‘Today marks an important shift in our relationship, and now, the real work begins,’ he said. ‘Now is our time to work together towards a new era of fairness and justice for First Nations and a stronger Canada for all Canadians, guided by the Declaration’s core principles of respect, partnership and reconciliation.’ ”

Raja Paul thanked Canada’s Global Mother Divine Organization for their representation at the event, and noted the moving presentation by the Director of the First Nations Women’s Council, building on the September 2010 “International Women’s Conference – Restoring Balance: Indigenous Grandmothers Call to the Women of the World” at Maharishi University of Management, and demonstrating how deeply First Nations appreciate and resonate with the ideals of Global Mother Divine.

With great cooperation between Canada and the United States, and between Global Country of World Peace and the Global Mother Divine Organization, the Symposium was a watershed event, opening new doors to bring all of Maharishi’s programs for health, happiness and success to First Nations, and to the world as a whole.

PRIVATIZING INDIAN LAND WOULD BE DISASTROUS

Star Phoenix

A debate that has been swirling around in Indian Country has gathered more speed recently.

The issue revolves around Indian land and its ownership status. Should it be privatized or should it stay as a part of a collective? The question about what to do with Indian land has always been on the table.

In the early part of the 20th century, after most of the available land was opened for settlement, land speculators cast greedy eyes upon Indian land. We were considered a vanishing race at the time, with much more land than we needed.

Large chunks of reserve land were surrendered under dubious circumstances as a result, often with the unambiguous assistance of the Department of Indian Affairs. Recent land claim settlements have provided money to purchase the lost land. That, combined with treaty land entitlement, has seen the rapid growth in Indian-held land in Saskatchewan.

Now the public discourse has turned to First Nations’ property ownership. The First Nations Tax Commission today is developing a land title system for policy consideration

by aboriginal governments. This is a controversial topic that has been largely silent in Saskatchewan.

Land is held in common by all the members of a First Nation. Our people regard reserve land as land that our ancestors held back at the time of treaty. It is not land given to us, but is there for use by future generations.

If First Nations decide to sell their land, the Indian Act has a specific process for its surrender. There must be a band referendum.

In the past, Indian Affairs allowed the land surrender with a simple show of hands at a band meeting. Our elders have horror stories of the government withholding rations to coerce people to surrender their land.

The federal government has the constitutional responsibility for First Nations people and land reserved for them under section 91 (24) of the British North America Act. This clause, in effect, protects the collective title to the land held by First Nations. The privatization of Indian land would require a change to the Constitution.

Western civilization is hung up on property ownership. The fact that a group can hold land in common is anathema to this view.

Some Indian land has been coveted by land speculators, real estate developers and individuals looking to make a quick buck. On the other hand, much of the land in remote areas holds no real estate value, and the people exist in an economic vacuum.

It would appear that the old real estate maxim of location, location, location is what's really driving the value of First Nations lands.

Bands that have succeeded in large scale development are generally close to urban areas, and those mired in poverty are often far from any commercial centre.

Private ownership of the land appears to have little to do with it. Yet, that doesn't stop right-wing thinkers from wringing their hands about poor Indians being denied access to economic opportunities that exist out there.

But today's leaders such as Chief Clarence Louis of the Osoyoos Band or Chief D'Arcy Bear at Whitecap are busy developing First Nation lands, and the banks are coming to them.

There appear to be two alternatives for First Nation development: Continue to develop the land base with a collective approach; or risk it all by privatizing the land.

We've been fortunate in Saskatchewan. Land claims settlements and treaty land entitlement have allowed our band councils to purchase land near or within cities.

This land with commercial value has become a valuable source of economic development. In Saskatchewan's major cities, gas stations, casinos and office buildings

have sprung up on Indian land.

Many First Nations people who live off the reserve have invested in real estate and know about home ownership. But on reserve, home ownership does not hold the same investment potential.

On-reserve real estate holdings can exist, but that requires a vibrant economy. If a person builds a home on a reserve, he can own the building but not the land. He can sell that home only to another band member. This lowers the price of real estate, and makes a home part of one's legacy to the next generation rather than an investment. Real estate for investment purposes exists off-reserve.

Indian land is not real estate. It is our homeland, and to privatize it would be disastrous. This land is a legacy from our forefathers and we must turn it over to the next generation.

First Nation communities are not like small towns or rural communities. Reserve populations are families that have lived together for at least 135 years. We are related and share a common heritage.

Without the reserve that we hold in common, we would be a rootless diaspora that lacks both a past and a future.

LETTER OF CONCERN SENT TO TELEGRAPH JOURNAL BY CAROLINE ENNIS

Tobique is my community and I maintain that this community does not get the same respect as white communities get during an election process. I believe that the Telegraph Journal took a lot of liberty when it came to do a coverage of the problems that Tobique has undergone in recent times. One has to wonder why this was done in the middle of an election in our community. I can't imagine this happening to a white election process. If a national newspaper such as the Globe and Mail took the liberty to dig up everything negative about the leader of the opposition or the way Canada, under Prime Minister Harper, is managed and decided to run a series right up to the day before the election this would be seen as interference in an election and not tolerated. It appears that because this is a native community it is considered to be different and therefore can be treated without the same respect.

Only Indian communities are subjected to these actions. Different rules apply and prejudice is tolerated by those in power over us. History bears this out. As far as I can see the Telegraph Journal did not bother to investigate the root of the problem which goes back to the day Canada decided to make the Indian Act a law which applies only to us. There is no Japanese Act or Italian Act in Canada.

The only reason there is an Indian Act in place in this country is to justify the takeover of our homelands. These homelands cover every inch of Canada. All lands were used by one Indian Nation or another but there had to be a "legal" way to take over the land and its resources, hence the implementation of the Indian Act.

Europeans who came here and those in Europe had already decided that we were less than human so when the Indian Act was debated in Canada's House of Parliament there was no objection to its implementation. In fact the first Indian Agent said there would be no Indians left in fifty years. This statement is recorded in the Hansard. My point in this, that there has been a lack of respect for us from the beginning and today's attitude towards aboriginals in general is rooted in what was done in the past by the Government of Canada and its representative, the Department of Indian Affairs.

We have always been seen by the dominant society as easy targets and those who own newspapers are aware of this. It appears they will resort to anything to sell newspapers because they know they can do so with impunity. As far as the reservation is concerned we have, since the beginning of the Indian Act, been under-funded, or no funds were provided at all, as in the case of my childhood, whereas white communities, provinces have been funded since they joined the union. In other words, because of the theft of our land and resources white communities have benefitted while we were only provided "relief".

My suggestion to the Telegraph Journal is to do a series on how the Province of N.B. has prospered thanks to the takeover of resources connected to N.B. Power and the money the dam on our land has brought in since the 1950's. I would also encourage the Telegraph to hire Indian people as journalists if they are at all interested in fair and balanced reporting.

My last point is that the lack of or under funding in aboriginal communities has its roots in systemic racism within the Canadian system. This was the beginning of the problem yet WE are being blamed for the failures of the Government of Canada and its agent, INAC.

If we refuse to see the source of the problem how can it be set right? Caroline Ennis

UPDATED INFORMATION ON NATIVE BORDER CROSSING

What you should know:

The Government of Canada has received notification from the United States that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has approved the Secure Certificate of Indian Status border-crossing format as a Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative-compliant document to enter the U.S. by land or water.

INAC has been advised that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will continue to accept the current Indian Status Card for a reasonable transition period through 2010. The Government of Canada cautions individuals that the period and extent of this flexibility is entirely at the discretion of U.S. officials, and reminds travelers that when entering the U.S. via air, a valid passport or NEXUS card is required.

Document requirements for travelling to the United States by air require a valid

Canadian passport or Nexus Card. For further information on documentation requirements for visiting the United States please visit CBSA's website.

Sharing of Information:

All applicants applying for a border-crossing SCIS will have to provide consent to sharing of their information with Passport Canada, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), and subsequently the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

For the SCIS Border Crossing format, in addition to the information visible on the card, the following information is shared with CBSA and, only when presented, to the U.S. CBP:

Card Status Reason Code (valid/invalid)
Place of birth - Province / State
Issuing country (Canada)
Issuing jurisdiction (INAC)
Encoded Document Number (Optical Character Recognition / Machine Readable Zone)
Travel Verification Check

The SCIS border-crossing format is an acceptable document when visiting the U.S. via land and water ports-of-entry. To meet the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative requirements, Canada requires that all individuals who receive a Canadian issued secure identification must first undergo a travel verification check which provides assurance that the individual is able to leave Canada or being abroad, to leave that country. To obtain this card applicants must give consent to sharing information for the conduct of travel restriction verifications (security check).

DEAN'S DEN - "MY GIFTS"

Merry Christmas to all
Of my First Nation friends
And to each one the Greetings
That this Good Season sends,
I bring you Best Wishes
In the name of The Day
And as we celebrate
To each, their own way,
For to those who may differ
I believe we shall find
When all's said and done
We have The Creator in mind,
So, Good Cheer and Glad Tidings
Are my true gifts to you
May your family be blessed
And ... all that you do!
D.C. Butterfield

Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you can be successful or be happy.