

BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION

Big Trout Lake, Ontario

P0V 1G0

Tel.: (807) 537-2263

Fax: (807) 537-2574

ARCHIVES
doCip

ADDRESS OF THE BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION

TO:

THE 1993 SESSION
OF
THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP
ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

PRESENTED BY:

STANLEY SAINNAWAP
CHIEF BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION

WGIP 93/NAM.CAN/3

BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION

Big Trout Lake, Ontario

POV 1G0

Tel.: (807) 537-2263

Fax: (807) 537-2574

GREETINGS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP AND TO ALL PARTICIPANTS. I GIVE THESE GREETINGS ON BEHALF OF ALL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO, CANADA.

I CAN TELL YOU AS CHIEF OF THE BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION THAT I CAN CONFIRM OUR UNITY WITH OTHER FIRST NATIONS FROM OUR REGION AND OTHER REGIONS WHO ARE MAKING PRESENTATIONS THIS YEAR TO THIS WORKING GROUP OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

BECAUSE THESE ISSUES ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR MY PEOPLE, I WISH TO ADDRESS MY COMMENTS TO SPECIFIC PARAGRAPHS WITHIN THE DRAFT DECLARATION OF INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, SPECIFICALLY DRAFT PARAGRAPH 18.

OUR SITUATION AT BIG TROUT LAKE IS UNIQUE. OUR ANCESTRAL LANDS ARE IN THE HIGH SUB-ARCTIC REGION OF NORTHERN ONTARIO. WE ARE FAR NORTH OF ANY ROADS. TO THIS DAY OUR LANDS REMAIN IN AN UNSPOILED CONDITION THAT IS POSSIBLE. I SAY THIS BECAUSE WE ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM THE EFFECTS OF SUCH FORCES AS AIR POLLUTION WHICH COMES FROM FAR BEYOND OUR TERRITORIES. BUT WE HAVE NOT HAD OUR WATERS DAMMED LIKE OTHER FIRST NATIONS. WE HAVE NOT HAD TO FACE THE SEVERE DISLOCATION FROM THE POLLUTION AND FLOODING THAT RESULTS FROM MEGA-PROJECTS.

OUR LANDS HAVE BEEN CARED FOR UNDER OUR CUSTOMARY SYSTEMS OF RESOURCE USE AND STEWARDSHIP.

BUT I CAN SAY THAT EVEN IN THIS REGARD THAT THINGS ARE CHANGING FOR US. WE HAVE OBSERVED MINERAL EXPLORATION AT BIG TROUT LAKE WHERE MINING

COMPANIES ARE DRILLING FROM THE SHORE OF THE LAKE UNDERNEATH OUR WATERS IN SEARCH OF MINERALS. WE WERE NOT CONSULTED ON THIS ACTIVITY NOR WERE WE ASKED FOR PERMISSION FOR SUCH EXPLORATION. WE KNOW THAT THIS EXPLORATION IS A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME. WE WILL HAVE TO INTENSIFY OUR EFFORTS TO KEEP CONTROL OF OUR OWN TERRITORIES SO THAT WE CAN PROTECT THEM.

OUR ISOLATION HAS SERVED US WELL UP TO NOW. HOWEVER, WE MUST USE ALL OF OUR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH TO RETAIN OUR WAY OF LIFE. IN THIS REGARD, WE HAVE WORKED VERY HARD AT CARRYING ON EXTENSIVE COMMUNITY BASED CONSULTATIONS, HEADED BY OUR ELDERS ON OUR OWN CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY. WE HAVE NAMED OUR INITIATIVE TO PROTECT OUR LANDS: "KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB AAKI KANAAWAYNIMEDISOWIN". IN OUR ANISHINAABE LANGUAGE, THIS MEANS "KEEPING OUR LAND IN THE WAY THAT HAS BEEN HANDED ON TO US FROM OUR ANCESTORS".

WE ARE USING OUR "LANDS REPORT" AS A WORKING DOCUMENT TO ASSERT OUR CONCEPTS AND INTENTIONS OF AUTONOMY. WE HAVE ALSO PREPARED A REPORT ON OUR CUSTOMARY SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE. IN IT WE SHOW HOW OUR WAYS OF GOVERNANCE AND THOSE OF NON-ABORIGINAL CANADIANS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER. OUR SURVIVAL AS A PEOPLE DEPENDS ON OUR ABILITY TO EXERCISE OUR OWN FORMS OF GOVERNANCE. WE URGE THAT YOU CONSIDER THESE DOCUMENTS CAREFULLY AND MAKE ALL EFFORT TO INCORPORATE THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THEM IN THE DRAFT UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON INDIGENOUS RIGHTS.

ON BEHALF OF MY FIRST NATION, I MUST EMPHASIZE TO YOU THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IN THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES IN OUR FRAGILE NORTHERN ENVIRONMENT. AS FAR AS OUR FIRST NATION IS CONCERNED, LAND ISSUES ARE CENTRAL BECAUSE OUR PEOPLE STILL RELY ON OUR CUSTOMARY LAND BASE

FOR A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF OUR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. AS WELL, IT IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION TO PROTECT OUR CUSTOMARY LAND BASE SO THAT IT CAN CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR PEOPLE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

THE WAYS AND MEANS OF GOVERNING RELATIONSHIPS TO THE LAND, THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND, THE SYSTEMS GOVERNING ACCESS TO THE BOUNTY OF THE LAND, THE PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATION OF ALL THAT WE OBTAIN FROM THE LAND - ALL OF THESE ARE PROFOUNDLY DIFFERENT FROM THE SYSTEMS OF THE NON-ABORIGINAL SOCIETY.

NON-ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE SYSTEMATICALLY ATTEMPTED TO DICTATE AND CONTROL HOW OUR PEOPLE SHOULD RELATE TO LAND. THIS HAS CREATED A TRAGEDY OF INEQUALITY FOR US. IT HAS BECOME ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR OUR PEOPLE TO NURTURE OUR LIVELIHOODS IN RELATION TO LAND ON OUR OWN TERMS. THIS CAUSES THE INEQUALITY THAT EXISTS BETWEEN OUR PEOPLE AND NON-ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENTS WHO HAVE SUPPRESSED OUR CULTURE. TO REDUCE THIS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING OUR LAND MUST SHIFT BACK TO OUR PEOPLE.

OUR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES AS KEEPERS OF LAND REVOLVE AROUND OUR SPIRITUAL MANDATE TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT IT. THESE RELATIONSHIPS TO LAND ARE EXERCISED IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR CUSTOMS. THEY REVEAL SEVERAL PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD BE RESPECTED BY NON-ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENTS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS TO OUR PEOPLE. - MADAME CHAIRMAN, WE RESPECTFULLY SUGGEST THAT THESE PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN THE WORDING OF DRAFT OPERATIVE PARAGRAPH 18. THESE PRINCIPLES MAY BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

PRINCIPLE 1 - IT IS WITHIN THE CUSTOMARY LANDS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES THAT NO NON-ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD UNDERTAKE ANY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE FIRST NATION

PEOPLE INVOLVED. IN OUR CASE, THIS CONSENT MUST INCLUDE THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BIG TROUT LAKE FIRST NATION COMMUNITY. RELATIONSHIPS TO LAND MUST BE DIRECT AND EXERCISED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL - AT THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNITY.

PRINCIPLE 2 - THE CUSTOMARY RELATIONSHIPS OF OUR PEOPLE TO LAND SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED NOT ONLY WITHIN THE BOUNDARY DEMARCATED ON THE MAP IN FIGURE 1 BUT WHEREVER THESE RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN EXERCISED BY OUR PEOPLE. BUT OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS THE PRIMARY KEEPERS OF KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB AAKI MUST BE ACCEPTED AND RESPECTED.

PRINCIPLE 3 - IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED THAT OUR CUSTOMARY RELATIONSHIPS TO LAND CANNOT BE LIMITED IN THEIR APPLICATION TO ANY ONE PRACTICE ON THE LAND OR TO A PARTICULAR USE OF ANY TECHNOLOGY; RATHER, IT IS THE CHARACTER, FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THESE RELATIONSHIPS, THAT ARE SPECIFIC TO OUR CULTURE, WHICH MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED.

PRINCIPLE 4 - IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED THAT OUR CULTURE WILL GROW IN THESE RELATIONSHIPS AND ADAPT THEM AS OUR CULTURE ADAPTS ITSELF TO THE FUTURE IN A SELF-DIRECTED MANNER.

PRINCIPLE 5 - IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND ACCEPTED THAT OUR EXERCISE OF OUR CULTURE IN RELATION TO THE ABOVE PRINCIPLES IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF OUR SOCIETY; THIS IS THE BASIS AND ESSENCE OF OUR CULTURAL SURVIVAL AND GROWTH AS KITCHENUHMAYKOOSIB PEOPLE.

WE CONTINUE TO BE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WORDS SUCH AS "SELF-GOVERNMENT". THE LANGUAGE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN APPROPRIATED BY NON-ABORIGINAL GOVERNMENTS. WE AS ABORIGINAL PEOPLES HAVE BEEN FORCED INTO FORMS AND STRUCTURES OF SELF-GOVERNMENT THAT ARE FOREIGN TO US. EVEN OUR FIRST NATION ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS TRIBAL COUNCILS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS MUST BE ESTABLISHED IN ACCORDANCE WITH NON-ABORIGINAL CORPORATIONS LAW IN CANADA. THIS HAS RESULTED IN MUCH FRUSTRATION FOR OUR PEOPLE. OUR ELDERS TELL US THAT, IF WE HAVE TO, WE MUST ABANDON OUR PARTICIPATION IN THEM IN ORDER TO PROTECT OUR CULTURE.

THIS IS WHY OUR ELDERS HAVE EMPHASIZED AN UNDERSTANDING OF AUTONOMY

BASED ON OUR CONCEPT OF "KANAWAYNEMEDISOWIN". THIS MEANS ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OURSELVES. KEEPING THE INVOLVEMENT OF OUR ELDERS. KEEPING THE CENTRAL ROLE OF OUR ELDERS IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THIS AUTONOMY.

OUR ELDERS, INCLUDING JOHN HUDSON WHO IS SITTING BESIDE ME, SAY THAT WE ARE PEOPLE OF THE LAND AND THAT OUR IDENTITY COMES FROM THE LAND. WE AT BIG TROUT LAKE IN CANADA LIVE IN ONE OF THE LARGEST UNSPOILED FORESTS IN THE WORLD. AS SUCH, OUR CONCEPT OF LIFE IS TIED TO THE LAND. WE ARE DETERMINED TO KEEP THIS WAY OF LIFE. WE WANT TO STATE THIS HERE PUBLICLY TODAY.

IN CONCLUSION, WE WANT TO EXPRESS OUR HOPE THAT THE UNITED NATIONS WILL MOVE FORWARD WITH THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WITH ALL OF THE SPEED THAT YOU CAN FIND. REMEMBER THAT AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, WE ARE NOT AS MANY AS THE DOMINANT SOCIETIES WE LIVE WITHIN. BUT BY FAR OUR PEOPLES POSSESS THE GREATEST DEGREE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON THE WHOLE EARTH. I URGE THAT THE UNITED NATIONS ACT IMMEDIATELY SO THAT WE MAY PROTECT THIS HERITAGE WHICH IS CRITICAL FOR THE FUTURE OF ALL HUMANITY.

MEEGWETCH, THANK YOU