

Open Letter to Stephen Harper et al.

NOV 1, 2010

from **LYNN GEHL, PHD.,
PETERBOROUGH, ON**

re **ALGONQUIN OF ONTARIO
LAND CLAIMS AND
SELF-GOVERNMENT PROCESS**

EARLY ON, I was taught that Algonquin Anishinaabe territory in the Ottawa River Valley was indeed my home. Although my ancestors are from the reserve at Golden Lake, Ontario and many of my deceased ancestors are buried in the community cemetery, through the gender discrimination codified in The Indian Act my great-grandmother and kokomis (grandmother) were escorted off the reserve in the late 1920s. When the Algonquin land claims and self-government process began in the early 1980s, I was hopeful that the exile created for me and many others would finally be resolved. Thus, I eagerly applied with the enrolment clerk at Pikwàkanagàn First Nation to be accepted under Algonquin Enrolment Law. On October 13, 1994, I was officially accepted. This acceptance did not provide me with Algonquin membership or citizenship, but merely the right to be kept informed.

Since my enrolment, I have been on a long Debwewin Journey of coming to know. I have come to know that although the Algonquin Anishinaabe always resided in what is now called the Ottawa River Valley, the geographic heart of Canada and location where Canada's parliament buildings reside, and although we facilitated The Treaty at Niagara in 1764 where a total of twenty-four Indigenous Nations participated, the Algonquin were continually denied a treaty. This occurred despite our submission of twenty-eight petitions over a one hundred year period. As a

result of this denial the Algonquin Anishinaabe were relegated to the margins of Canadian society.

Since my enrolment, I have made huge efforts to understand the history of the treaty, land claims, and self-government process, such as learning the difference between the terms "treaty" and "land claims" and why the two are used interchangeably. In this effort, I have come to know that through the contemporary land claims and self-government process, the state has misappropriated the term "treaty" while operating within unilaterally drafted policies that place tight restrictions and parameters around the negotiation process and, subsequently, the final outcome.

Still further, I have come to know that current land settlement quotas are less than the historic treaties, and that although billions and billions of resource dollars have been extracted from and created in Algonquin Anishinaabe territory through the lumber, hydroelectric, and mineral industries, current resource revenue sharing achieved through the contemporary land claims and self-government processes are capped and are not constitutionally protected. Succinctly, I have come to know that the process is skewed as the governments of Canada hold all of the power in the process. It is in these ways that the governments of Canada fail to engage in true treaty making and it is through these processes that viable Indigenous self-governing systems are not



achieved. Rather, through the contemporary land claims and self-government process the Canadian state merely eliminates their fiduciary responsibilities at little cost.

Notwithstanding this critique, I have also made an effort to understand the traditional governance systems and structures that the Algonquin Anishinaabe employed historically in their desire to achieve *mino-bimadiz-iwin* (a good life). These structures included a powerful system of good governance such as the Anishinaabe Clan System of Governance where every person was respected and held responsibility and knowledge within the collectivity; the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings of Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, Respect, Courage, Love and Truth; and wampum diplomacy which served to codify significant political relationships. Unfortunately, through my experience I have also come to know that within the Algonquin land claims and self-government process, systems and structures of good governance such as these were not established at the onset, before negotiations with the federal and provincial governments began. As a result, power has become skewed in favour of *Pikwàkanagàn* First Nation, which represents the federally registered Algonquin, who are less than one-quarter of the total number of Algonquin accepted through Algonquin Enrolment Law.

Furthermore, and contrary to the Two-Row Wampum Treaty, through my experience I have learned that the Ontario Ministry

of Natural Resources has interfered with and thus confounded Algonquin governance when the political organization known as the Algonquin Nation Tribal Council (ANTC), versus a non-partisan administrative arm, was granted the jurisdiction to distribute hunting tags. This action on the part of the Ontario government was a violation of federal policy. Not surprisingly, this interference has had huge negative repercussions with the politics of non-status leadership and the politics of Algonquin constitutional beginnings and will forever plague the process. I have come to know that rules of governance must not be subject to politics of the Canadian governments or the politics of the Indigenous government. Rather, the politics of the people and the parties must both be subject to the rules of good governance, otherwise corruption and mistrust will guide the process.

Due to a lack of good governance structures I have also come to know that the entire Algonquin land claims and self-government process lacks the gender balance required for the process to be viewed as legitimate. In this way, the process is contrary to the federal government's recommendations stated in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, the state's official response to *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and in this way the process lacks the legitimacy required. Consequently, through this long Journey I have come to know that the divisions created

by colonialism between status and non-status, between on-reserve and off-reserve, between in-territory and out-of-territory, and between men and women are too great for the Algonquin to resolve without first placing a great deal of attention to the matter of de-colonizing both our hearts and minds, and subsequently our governance practices.

To this end, unfortunately, I have come to know that the exile the Canadian state has created for me will not be resolved through current land claims and self-government policies and practices. Given this new knowledge gained, I no longer wish to participate in the Algonquin land claims and self-government process and I no longer wish to be enrolled under Algonquin Enrolment Law. Although there are no mechanisms to un-enroll myself from Algonquin Enrolment Law, please accept this letter as my official statement that I no longer wish to participate in your pitiful process. It is in this way that I honour my ancestors, my relationship to the land, and future generations, Algonquin Anishinaabe and otherwise. This is my truth that is rooted in my heart.

Kino Giw Endoowaabn-danjig Debwewin,



Dr. Lynn Gehl,
Gii-Zhigaate-Mnidoo
Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe

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