

Transcript for Video:

Moratorium on Development in the Haldimand Tract, April 20, 2021

On display in *We Remain Certain*, curated by Protect the Tract

On view January 9 to March 22, 2024 at McMaster Museum of Art.

In 2006, the Council of Chiefs of the Haudenosaunee, Grand River Territory, affirmed our land rights in the tract conferment by Governor Frederick Haldimand on October 25, 1784. In making this statement, the Council of Chiefs made it clear that we hold certain land ethics and principles that must be respected in any agreements on land use or occupation. The Haudenosaunee, and its governing authority, have inherited the rights to land from time immemorial. Land is a birthright, essential to the expression of our culture.

With these land rights come specific responsibilities that have been defined by our law, from our Creation Story, the Original Instructions, the (Great Law of Peace) *Gayə̃nashago:wah* and (Good Message) *Gaiwiyo*. Land is envisioned as (the Dish with One Spoon) *Sgagaksa:t*; this means that we can all take from the land what we need to feed, house and care for our families, but we also must assure that the land remains healthy enough to provide for the coming generations. Land is meant to be shared among and by the people and with other parts of the web of life. It is not for personal empire building.

First and foremost is the concept that we are connected to the land in a spiritual way. The earth is our mother and she provides for our long-term well-being, provided that we continue to honour her and give thanks for what she has provided. We Haudenosaunee have upheld our tradition of giving thanks through ceremony, and in the cultural practices that manifest our beliefs, values, traditions and laws. Planting, cultivating, harvesting, gathering, hunting, and fishing also have spiritual aspects that must be respected and perpetuated if the land is to provide for our future generations, and the future generations of our neighbours. We are stewards. Our spiritual obligation is part of that stewardship.

Second, according to our law, the land is not private property that can be owned by any individual. In our worldview, land is a collective right. It is held in common, for the benefit of all. The land is actually a sacred trust, placed in our care, for the sake of coming generations. We must protect the land. We must draw strength and healing from the land. If an individual, family or clan has the exclusive right to use and occupy land, they also have a stewardship responsibility to respect and join in the community's right to protect land from abuse.

We have a duty to utilize the land in certain ways that advance our Original Instructions. All must take responsibility for the health of our Mother.

Our ancestors faced overwhelming odds and relentless pressure to give up our lands. We all know that unscrupulous measures were employed to coerce our ancestors into "selling" the land. At other times, outright fraud took place, as was acknowledged in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The agreements we recognize reflect an intention to share land, and to lease land, within the context of the Covenant Chain relationship that our nations maintain with the Crown. Our wampum belts, treaty council documents and oral history inform us that we always retained the right to hunt, fish, and gather upon all of our

lands. This reflects the spirit of sharing that we expect to continue and is another example of the Dish with One Spoon.

We seek justice in our long-standing land rights issues. We seek an accurate accounting of the use and investment of the funds held by the Crown on our behalf, and land transactions conducted by the Crown involving our lands. For nearly two hundred years our Chiefs have been asking for such accounting and justice. Generations of our elders have passed away with these matters unresolved. It is time to end the injustice.

We want the land that is ours. We are not interested in approving fraudulent dispossessions of the past. We are not interested in selling land.

Our faith in the Canadian people is strong, as we feel that the majority of Canadians also want to see justice on these matters. However, their elected representatives and public servants have failed to act effectively to address and resolve these matters. It is time to lift the cloud of denial and to wipe away the politics that darken the vision of the future. It is time we are heard clearly, and our cases should be addressed with utmost good faith and respect.

Today, we are putting in place a moratorium on development in the Haldimand Tract. No development can proceed along the Haldimand Tract without the consent of the Haudenosaunee. The moratorium builds on our Land Rights Statement to end the exploitation of lands and resources along the Tract and marks a shift on land stewardship within a portion of the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee.

We firmly believe that if we have respect and trust, we will find mutually agreeable solutions that will reflect our long-standing friendship. We want the Crown to keep its obligations to treaties, and ensure all Crown governments-federal, provincial and municipal-are partners in those obligations. We want an honourable relationship with Canada.

We seek to renew the existing relationship that we had with the Crown prior to 1924. That relationship is symbolized by the ("The thing by which they link arms") *Atęnadatnętsq:dę*: also known as the Silver Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship.

Our ancestors met repeatedly to repolish that chain, to renew its commitments, to reaffirm our friendship and to make sure that the future generations could live in peace, and allow the land to provide its bounty for the well-being of all the people.

The Covenant Chain symbolizes our treaty relationship, also symbolized by (Two Row Wampum) *Dekni deyoha:de gaswęda'*, which affirms the inherent sovereignty and distinctness of our governments. An essential part of the relationship is our commitment to resolve matters through good-faith negotiation between our governments.

Our vision for the future is self-determined, based in our inherent right to protect our lands for future generations of Haudenosaunee children. The Haudenosaunee intend to exercise our jurisdiction over our lands and waters in a way that maintains the delicate balance between Creation and humans, focusing on sustainability and responsiveness to climate change to protect waterways and ecologically sensitive areas.

This moratorium is consistent with previous statements and proclamations on our land rights. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council endorses, supports, and recognizes that development

should not be proceeding on our lands. The HCCC, as Chiefs and Clan Mothers, continue to support the efforts and stand behind our people who are protecting our land rights.

As we continue to work on the process of respecting our land rights, we must always place our children at the front of our minds. We are committed to peaceful resolutions of these long-standing issues.