

The Onondaga Council of Chiefs

Memorandum on Tribal Sovereignty

"In ancient history in a time such as this the Great Peace Maker came among our people carrying the message of peace from the Creator. He buried the weapons of war beneath the Great Tree of Peace and he united our people under the leadership of the Council of Chiefs who were told to follow the laws and protect the Great Tree of Peace and our people who are sheltered there. We do not have a word for warrior. The men are called Hodiskengehdah. It means all the men who carry the bones, the burden of their ancestors, the ancient ones on their backs."

The Onondaga Council of Chiefs issue this communique on sovereignty because the word has been invoked in the current situation in Akwesasne and because the Council of Chiefs at Akwesasne have requested a statement and because a request for legal clarification of treaty law was requested by a representative of the gambling establishments. Sovereignty lies with the people. Guyanahgawah, The Great Law of Peace states: Issues affecting the Nation or Nations must come before the people and that there must be an unanimous decision by the Council of Chiefs before an issue can be sanctioned.

Every person has a right to peace and tranquility on his or her lands. The Haudenosaunee Lands are lands held in common, one of the few places left in Indian country exercising that aboriginal right. Therefore, consent of all the people is required before changes can occur that will affect the lives of the people.

There are questions that must be answered by the gambling casino owners, including high stakes bingo:

1st: Do they have outside non-Indian business partnerships? If they do, and they did not get the consent of the Council of Chiefs then they themselves have violated the sovereignty of the Mohawk people by bringing into sovereign Mohawk territory non-Indian people as business partners.

2nd: Are there revenues taken off the Mohawk Nation territories without the consent of the Mohawk Nation? Then, Mohawk sovereignty is being violated again by non-Indians and their Indian partners. There should be an accounting of these revenues to the people.

3rd: The sovereignty of the Mohawk people is being violated every day by the invasion of non-Indian people crossing Mohawk boundary lines to take part in illegal gambling activities on Mohawk Nation territories, also violating

the laws of the Mohawk Nation and the Haudenosaunee.

The answer to these questions are important because Iroquois territories are under ancient law, and if these laws are being violated by a handful of people for personal gain, then positive action must be taken to protect the interests of the people. The Longhouse people are bound by our law and Akwesasne is part of the Haudenosaunee, "The people of the Longhouse." We support the Mohawk Nations' efforts to bring controls and peace to their territories.

We also understand that the development of gambling enterprises were authorized and unilateral actions were taken by individuals to take advantage of the sovereign status of Indian lands.

Because sovereignty lies with the people, then consent must be obtained from every Mohawk citizen, or their actions begin to destroy our sovereignty.

We have witnessed the corruption of young people by these businesses in all Haudenosaunee territories. Money and jobs seem to be the criteria for individuals while huge personal fortunes are accrued by the partnerships of the gambling casinos without accounting to the people or the governing bodies of the Haudenosaunee territories.

The Two Row wampum is specific in its directives and instruction to our people.

The gamblers and smugglers and supporters sitting in the boat of our white brothers [are] tugging on our canoe. The great values of our Nations are being threatened. The value of respect for the rights of others is being trampled on by these aggressive enterprises. Force of arms appears to be a factor. The businesses have created mercenaries of some of our people.

These businesses have corrupted our people and we are appalled at the Longhouse people who have become part of these activities. They have thrown aside the values of our ancient confederacy for personal gain.

It is inappropriate and misleading to designate oneself as a sovereign force for the people without the consent of the people. The warrior society is a self designated entity. We do not think Haudenosaunee people will rush forward to protect the financial interests of a few people and their slot machines called "one armed bandits." The arguments of sovereignty from these people are spacious considering the conduct of their gambling "business" leaders. Further, these people are not shielded by the sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation or the Haudenosaunee in courts of law, because they did not have the sanction of the Nations to act on their behalf.

There are young people armed with automatic and semi- automatic weapons and they appear as a security force for individual casino owners. We believe

that the militarization of these enclaves challenges good government by the leaders of the community. What we see are our youths being deluded into thinking that they are defending sovereignty when in fact they are protecting the financial interests of a few casino owners and their non-Indian partners.

The issue as it appears to us is not sovereignty but the use of every Mohawk's sovereignty to benefit a few. The issue is: WHAT DIRECTION ARE THE MOHAWK PEOPLE GOING TO TAKE FOR THEIR FUTURE?

Gambling in Indian country throughout the United States has a short life. It has led to federal regulations and control according to state laws, laws that are already passed in Congress. Las Vegas style casino gambling is about as poor an issue to challenge sovereignty on as we could think of, yet it could jeopardize jurisdiction in all Haudenosaunee territories. It's a matter of time and the real crime is that these casino owners know it and will get what they can, while they can. The nations of the Haudenosaunee have all the options any nation has to deal with these problems.

The insurgency of these entrepreneurial enterprises challenges the long standing government of the Haudenosaunee and the values of the Great Law that have inspired nations to democracy. Treaty Law is available to our Nations, in particular, Article Seven of the Canadaigua Treaty.

One of the major effects of these self-designated enterprises is that it has complicated the income tax situation and brought about tax issues directly into our territories. These entrepreneurs will not pay the taxes that they may bring down on Indian country.

Land claims are the most important issue we are engaged in today, claims that will insure our future in our lands independent and sovereign. It's ironic that it is a segment of our own people who are diverting energy and attention away from this issue by their greedy actions, handful of people willing to squander our future for compensation now. Short sighted thinking indeed.

All revenues generated at the expense of Mohawk National sovereignty should go to their national treasury, to be administered by the Mohawk Nation. It is time for the Haudenosaunee to activate the trade and commerce commission that will regulate all commercial activities of our Confederacy.

Individual entrepreneurs should not receive these revenues into their private bank accounts, subject to their select largess, to buy the loyalty of key figures in the community and the youths of the Nation, thus undermining the leadership of the Mohawk Nation. These individuals whose leaders, idols, and values come from Las Vegas, Nevada, and other centers of national and international gambling activities, should not be allowed to direct Mohawk National policy on economics, trade and commerce. These directions belong to the people through their selected and responsible leadership. These

policies require vision and care if we are to survive as nations in the 21st Century.

The direction that these few individuals are taking the Nation is obvious as you look about and see the regulations staring you in the face. They have forced the issue and have no place to seek leadership except from those shadowy figures in the background supplying financial aid and direction for gambling and other illegal trafficking in cigarettes, people and drugs.

Money will not buy sovereignty. Only the political will of the people will insure that. For sovereignty to be effective, the Nation must be united. At the moment the Nation is divided and confused by the clever rhetoric of individuals. Common sense directs people back to their ancient established government whose interests are for the people.

We have been told by a young man, who at one time upheld the values of the Longhouse, that we do not understand. We understand only too well what he meant by that statement. We do not agree with their attempt to usurp the legitimate Mohawk government and replace it with the free wheeling, unregulated, ungoverned activities of wealthy individuals protected by their personal armed security forces just like the drug barons of Central and South America. Anarchy in Indian country is directed by Las Vegas and other enclaves of gambling. We take your direction from the Great Law of Peace that has insured our survival up to now, and indeed is providing direction for the world at large in these troubled times.

Our Nations have always been Nations of Law and Peace and we shall continue to be Nations of Law and Peace.

"He broke one arrow to illustrate the weakness of one nation. Then the Peacemaker bound five arrows together with deer sinew to illustrate the strength and unity of working together as the Haudenosaunee."

Da-Nay-To

Onondaga Nation

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