



*Eskasoni Chief and Council*

*Letter to the Community of Eskasoni*

*January 14, 2013*

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To: Eskasoni Community Members

The following letter is to update the community on the recent events in Ottawa during Friday meeting with the Prime Minister and the continued Idle No More movement many of us have been apart of. Let me first of say what an honor it was to represent our community the largest Mi'kmaq community in the world. During my 4 day fast many community visited and prayed with me and spoke to me regarding their concerns of the lack of Treaty Implementation and many were tired of the poverty and social problems that stem from the government lack of respect and implementation of our Treaties and Inherent rights. I was proud during the past few weeks to hear from many members our community, our staff, our council and members of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council. With the combined discussion I have been humbled by the knowledge of our community members, and by our commitment to ensuring our children's future will be one where the true spirit and intent of our treaties are fulfilled. With that said I would like to give recap on the events that transpired last week.

Early last week, after discussion on with the Grand Council members I was asked to deliver a message on behalf of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council to the Atlantic Policy Congress (APC) during a meeting on Jan 8<sup>th</sup> that discussed the proposed meeting that Prime Minister Harper had committed to. It was an honor and privilege to do so and at the meeting I read the letter that the Grand Council had requested I give. It outlined 4 major demands of the Mi'kmaq Nation that needed to be delivered to the Prime Minister.

- **That Canada makes the implementation of Mi'kmaq treaties an integral part of the new strategy and relationship.**
- **That a Treaty attorney general for the Mi'kmaq be established in Atlantic Canada to protect our Constitutional rights and our human rights in accordance with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples.**
- **That Canada acknowledges our Constitutional rights, including our commerce right to trade to ensure a prosperous livelihood for our communities and families.**
- **That Canada repeal those provisions in Bill C-45 that apply to our unrelinquished and reserved lands, waters, and environment and put an end to other legislation aimed at hindering Mi'kmaq access to our resources**

After much discussion our Atlantic Chiefs supported the letter and discussed creating an APC letter as well on behalf of the Atlantic chiefs.

On Thursday the day before the meeting myself and two of my fellow councilors Chris Stevens and Dion Denny arrived in Ottawa during a time of much turmoil. We were informed during an evening gathering that Chief Spence was boycotting the meeting, unless the Governor General was included in the meeting as her treaties were like the Mi'kmaq treaties signed not with Canada but with the British Crown. Chief Spence and other chiefs were also demanding that the Prime Minister should allow all chiefs to be in the room not the limit of 20 proposed by the Prime Minister. During the evening discussions many chiefs relayed their support for Chief Spence, and also committed to boycotting the meeting. Many valid points were raised on the need for solidarity, however that meetings should continue in the morning and that the Assembly of First Nations would meet early and then meet with each region to hear what each region had decided on.

The following day there was a meeting for the AFN executive, many Regional chiefs informed the National Chief that the chiefs from their regions and community members wanted a meeting to occur. The National Chief pushed for a larger venue with more inclusion but was denied by the Prime Ministers office. During this time there was continued dialogue at the AFN building within the NS chiefs, as well as the Mi'kmaq chiefs from other regions as to whether we should attend. After much discussion it was decided that as Mi'kmaq we were sent to Ottawa to deliver a message to the Prime Minister and that as Mi'kmaq it is our duty to ensure that that message on treaty implementation is delivered. We were reminded of the role of the National Chief, which is to break down doors and then get out of the way. Seeing how the national executive with help from the Idle No More movement and the hunger strike (by not only Chief Spence but also Mi'kmaq Elder from Elsipogtog Gene Sock) had created an opportunity to address the Prime Minister that it was our obligation as Mi'kmaq to ensure our Treaties and our voices were heard.

As Mi'kmaq leadership with consensus we agreed to send Chief Terry Paul and Chief Deborah Robinson. While there were a few members of our community who thought we should uphold a boycott that the Manitoba and Ontario chiefs were insisting on we proceeded with sending two representatives to the meeting and the rest of our leadership joined the protest on Parliament hill. The rally on the Parliament hill brought more than 3,000 people from all across Canada, and I was proud to see many waiving the Mi'kmaq flag proudly. The speakers were empowering and united in the need for an end to poverty, the need for Treaty implementation, and the need for the protection of our lands and resources. Despite the freezing temperatures the Protest/Rally lasted more than 3 hours and it made me proud to be Indigenous.

After the meeting myself, and a delegation of Mi'kmaq went to Victoria Island to meet with Chief Spence and to speak with her team at the hunger strike. We met with Gene Sock a Mi'kmaq from Elsipogtog and prayed with him, sang and drummed with him, and shared our visions for Mi'kmaq rights and the future of our children. He expressed that he was happy that as Mi'kmaq we came to see

him, and that we explained our point of view on the PM meeting to him. Then we met with Chief Spence briefly because she was on her way to meet with the Governor General that evening. I hugged her and explained that I had fasted four days along with other Mi'kmaq for her well-being and her cause.

At the end of the day, I had dinner with some of our local Idle No More organizers, and we discussed the day's events. We heard back from Chief Terry and Chief Debbie that the meeting went well, and a lot of good discussion took place; however at the end of the day the Prime Minister commitments fell short of what the Mi'kmaq had hoped to hear and we are cautiously optimistic about his willingness to make treaties a priority. It does not appear that after a month, of protests and rallies that we have seen any movement by the current government that would lead me to believe the time for actions and demonstrations should stop; However I would caution that our people need to understand that the Idle No More movement is a Marathon not Sprint, we have to ensure that we are able to stay motivated and stay energized throughout this long process whether it takes weeks, months, or even years. We must ensure that we don't lose our momentum too early in this process.

Many people may speak of division or fighting between us but I think this is tactic by the media and the government to ignore the real issues and the unity being shown across the country in this historic movement. I really like Wab Kinew's analogy that at the family dinner table, we may not all agree with each other but we are in this together. As long as we continue to respect each other, and work with each other I have no doubt in my mind that we can make a difference. In closing I would like to continue my support of the Idle No More movement and those on hunger strike with chief Spence especially fellow Mi'kmaq Gene Sock. I on behalf of our council, and staff ask you to continue to become aware of the issues, become knowledgeable of our rights, and continue hope, pray, and believe that we can make a difference in the days, weeks, months and years to come, Welalioq.