



A PLACE OF VISIONS AND DREAMS

January 22, 2013

Join Me in the Circle of Respect:

An Open Letter to My Non-Aboriginal Neighbours

Aanii, hello, to all my non Aboriginal relations. Greetings to you from your neighbours at Whitefish River First Nation.

These are days of much anxiety, tension and excitement in our relationship as Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in this country. There is much to process, much to say, much to hear. If I could, I would organize one enormous coast-to-coast-to-coast talking circle, so that we could all listen to each other and build a common understanding and purpose. But, because we cannot have that talking circle face-to-face, please accept these words, spoken from my heart, into the circle of our relationship.

I am Chief Shining Turtle, of the Sturgeon clan, of the Whitefish River First Nation of the Anishinabe. You know me as Franklin Paibomsai who has lived and worked in your world.

My heart is filled with excitement, pride and heaviness these days. I am so proud of our people, especially the youth, and the peaceful way that round dance drums are beating across this country to bring a message of cultural pride and the determination to stand up for our rights. I am excited to see youth in my own community raising their voices and moving their feet to lead this call for change. And I am happy to see some non-Aboriginal neighbors standing and dancing beside us.

But my heart is also heavy, hearing misunderstandings about my people and what we seek. I taste the bitterness of angry and poisonous words, raised to discount or protest what is happening with the Idle No More movement and the current protests. And so I speak to you today to try to bring understanding to heal this wound between us.

These “Idle No More” drums are not just for us: they beat for you. We are all treaty people – our ancestors together entered into the treaties and we are all bound by them. We are all diminished, and we are all poorer, when the sacred promises made in the treaties are broken. You and we are all weakened when the treaty relationship is harmed.

Our drums also beat for you, not just ourselves, because the legislation we are protesting does not just harm us – it hurts you and your children and your grandchildren. This is not about ‘just

WHITEFISH RIVER FIRST NATION

17A Rainbow Ridge Road, Ontario P0P 1A0

TEL (705) 285-4335 FAX (705) 285-4532 www.whitefishriver.ca

us', your Aboriginal neighbours – it is about 'justice' for you, too. The "Omnibus" budget bills passed by the government, and which we are protesting, change over 100 Canadian laws in ways which will irreparably harm the water, the fish, our fellow creatures, and the earth that we all rely on for life.

I cannot tell you what path to follow. I cannot tell you to join our protest. But I can tell you the story of what we know of these legislative changes. So I ask you to listen, and take this story to heart, so that you will understand its meaning for you. Then it is up to you to decide what to do about it.

The story of how the government passed these bills, and what these bills change in the laws, is such an important story that we, your Aboriginal neighbours, have been beating drums and raising our voices to tell this story. We know this story could forever change our relationship with the water and the earth, and that our children and grandchildren for many generations will pay the price if the story does not take a turn towards justice.

The federal government passed Bill C-38, which changes over 70 federal laws, in June. That bill changes federal laws about fish, environmental assessment, endangered species protection, and many other areas (such as old age security, employment insurance, nuclear safety and health care transfers to the provinces). Its companion legislation, Bill C-45, changes over 40 additional federal laws, and was passed in December. Bill C-45 changes the environmental protections available for most rivers and lakes in Canada, and many other federal laws. (You may recall seeing pictures on the news of our Chiefs trying to enter the House of Commons to stop the final approval of this bill). And in addition to these bills, the government has introduced a group of many proposed laws which will harm Aboriginal peoples and make it more difficult for us to work towards healthy, sustainable communities.

I cannot, in this short letter to you, outline all the changes in the 950 pages and dozens of pieces of federal legislation involved with just Bill C-38 and Bill C-45, or in all the other pieces of legislation – you will have to educate yourself. (I can suggest one resource: look at <http://www.oktlaw.com/blog/a-legislative-road-map-as-idle-no-more-revs-up>)

I can tell you, though, what most concerns me the most about all the changes: put together, they dramatically change the degree to which we in Canada will be able to protect and respect the water, the fish, and our fellow creatures. These bills take power away from the public – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – to review and understand and speak out about projects which could harm the environment. Your children and grandchildren, and my grandchildren, will live in an unhealthier – and, as a result, a poorer – world because of it. These bills already took away the power of the normal Parliamentary process for proper and thorough review of legislative changes, by rolling massive changes to over 100 laws into one bill without proper Committee hearings and consideration of all the individual pieces.

There are high stakes involved in the protests about Bill C-38 and Bill C-45 – the dangers we face are dangers to the earth and the water and the long term survival and health of our people

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and your people. Such high stakes lead to a lot of passion, energy, excitement and (sometimes) anger.

We as your Aboriginal neighbours have been working to channel that energy and anger into positive resistance. The round dances you see in your malls or blocking your roads are both a call for change and a celebration of our culture. They are mostly organized by our youth, and I am proud to watch them find new and visionary ways to combine new technologies with aboriginal culture and a commitment to self-determination. The dances we are doing are also a dance for life: they are call-outs to remind us all to respect the earth and our relationship with each other.

And the circle of those dances is not complete until you join us.

I know that it is up to you -- not me -- to know your own journey but I also know that many of you have hearts open to hear this call, and so I speak these words into the circle between us:

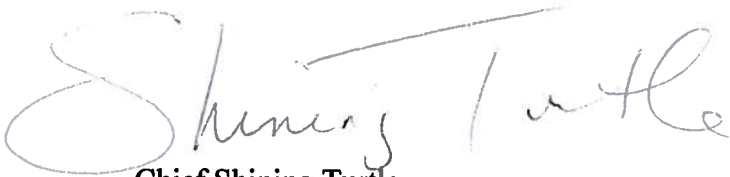
Let us work together, to ensure respect for earth, the water and our fellow creatures.

Let us work together to honour the sacred treaty relationship we have with one another.

Let us work together to creatively, peacefully and firmly push our government to repeal or amend the recently-passed laws which will harm the earth and us all.

Let us join together in the circle dance of respect for each other and the earth.

In Friendship,



Chief Shining Turtle
Whitefish River First Nation



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