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Indigenous Rights in the Commonwealth Caribbean and Americas Meeting

Georgetown, Guyana, 23rd-25th June 2003

Message from Kenneth Deer, Mohawk Nation, Kahnawake, Canada

To the participants,

As the strawberries ripen with the coming of summer, I send you greetings from the Chiefs, Clanmothers, the men, the women, the children and those not yet born of the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake to your Chiefs, Clanmothers, men, women, children and those who are not yet born.

I hope this letter finds all of you in good health and good spirits.

I send you this message because I cannot be there in person to address you. It is with great disappointment that I was not allowed to enter Guyana on my Haudenosaunee Passport.

Myself and many others have travelled the world and experienced the hospitality of many nations and have seldom been refused entry to any country. I hope that in the future this problem can be solved and some day the Mohawk will be welcome in Guyana.

I believe we, the Mohawk, have a lot to share with other Indigenous Peoples in the Commonwealth. We have a long history with the British colonisers and their offspring, the United States of America and Canada. We do not consider ourselves subjects of the British Crown, but allies, who we have fought for the Crown, at times, in defense of Canada.

We have never given up our sovereignty or our nationality. We have a constitution, The Great Law of Peace, that predates European contact, which many of us still live by today. This Law outlines our political structure, our social responsibilities and our spiritual cycle.

Despite efforts by the Canadian government to destroy our nation, we have been able to survive because we have strong beliefs in who we are and it is this strong sense of nationality that has allowed us to survive into the 21st century. We continue to make strides to overcome the assimilationist policies of the Canadian government and have been flourishing for many years. Step by step we took

control of our lives back from the oppressive Indian Act which regulates all aspect of Indigenous life in Canada.

We took back our school system; we teach our Mohawk Language which was almost destroyed by the residential school system of the Canadian government. We established our own police department after removing the government police program from our communities. Our economy is growing, anchored by our high steelworkers and a burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit.

We have asserted our right to self-determination in every way we can. At times our assertiveness was by evolution and at times by revolution, but we always maintained a steady rate of progress to control our lives.

Our assertion of our political, cultural and economic rights today is too long and complex to explain in this one message. I would prefer that all of you come to visit Mohawk Territory.

We can treat you to our hospitality and allow you to experience our culture and heritage. We will not turn anyone away. As Indigenous people, we are far better at showing you our communities than we are by writing about them.

So consider this message an invitation to all of you, particularly to the government of Guyana, to experience our hospitality and visit the Mohawk Nation.

I submit this message with all sincerity,

In Peace and Friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kenneth Deer', written in a cursive style.

Kenneth Deer

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