

Assignment: Land Acknowledgement

Scenario: An address to public servants at a federal government employee townhall during Treaties Recognition Week (first week of November)

I would like to begin this townhall by acknowledging that the land on which we gather here today is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg (*ah-nee-SHEE-nah-beg*) People. The peoples of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Nation have lived on this territory for time immemorial. We honour the People, the land, the survivors, those who died, and all the children who have been lost to their families and communities over millennia. We recognize and mourn the genocide that is the Residential School legacy and are fully engaged in the ongoing labour of Truth and Reconciliation.

Today marks the beginning of Treaties Recognition Week, which takes place every year during the first week of November. It was introduced in 2016 as a way to honour the importance of treaties and to encourage Ontarians to “learn more about treaty rights and relationships, as we are all treaty people”¹.

This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. They included more than 30 land surrenders, which were negotiated by colonizing officials and Indigenous peoples between 1781 and 1923. Formally giving up these lands mostly involved one-time payments with no or few ongoing commitments, except for some agreements to create reserves as well as guaranteed fishing rights in local rivers². They allowed for the development of southern and eastern Ontario. Without these Treaties, Ottawa, as we know it today, would not exist.

While acknowledging Indigenous People, territory and Treaties is beneficial, it is only a small part of healing our relationship with communities and forging a strong and conscientious way forward. It should be but one element within a larger context of “genuine and ongoing work to build real understanding, and to challenge the legacies of colonialism”³.

As part of the larger context of Truth and Reconciliation, I would like to propose a call to action for all of us here today. Consider donating time, money, or supplies to Minwaashin Lodge, an Indigenous women’s support centre here in Ottawa. They provide a variety of programs and services to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and children. We can also reach out to local Indigenous people, communities, businesses, and artists in our personal and professional lives, and open pathways for dialogue, cultural understanding, growth opportunities, and healing.

And lastly, I propose a call to action for parents, like myself, to break the cycle of historical misinformation and omission and begin an honest, empathic, and open dialogue at home. It is our responsibility to seek information and raise the next generation so that truth is woven into their moral fiber and they assume an active role in reconciliation as a way of life.

Thank you for listening.

¹ <https://leddy.uwindsor.ca/featured/treaties-recognition-week>

² <https://collectionscanada.ca/aboriginal-heritage/020016-3008-e.html#dd>

³ <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>