



*Tsi Nahò:ten Karihwanákere Nò:nen'k*

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Kahnawà:ke continues assertion of sovereignty over lands

For Immediate Release

**(Kahnawake – 15 Onerahtókha/April 2025)** The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (MCK) announced that it is resolutely reaffirming its continued sovereignty over its lands, particularly in the Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis Land Grievance, which stretches along the south shore of Kaniatarowanèn:ne (the Saint Lawrence River) and encompasses many neighboring municipalities of the current land base of Kahnawà:ke. The MCK is making it unequivocally clear that the federal and provincial governments, as well as their citizens, must recognize and respect Kahnawà:ke's unceded territory.

For years, the MCK has been a vocal advocate for the reform of Canada's Specific Claims Policy and Process Guide, alongside the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act Action Plan. These reforms are essential to prioritize land back initiatives, respect unceded lands, and resolve historic land grievances. Despite persistent advocacy, the governments of Canada and Quebec have yet to implement legislation or policies that facilitate the return of lands to Indigenous communities.

"Federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh's proposal to use surplus federal lands for housing must prioritize collaboration with Kahnawà:ke and other First Nation communities," said Ohén:ton Í:rate ne Ratitsénhaienhs Cody Diabo. "Canada has a land debt - and we have a land grievance." It is imperative that citizens, voters, and residents of our unceded territories across Turtle Island, recognize the lands they are settling on, and to urge their decision-makers to resolve these issues with the true caretakers of the land. We declare an end to the era of disregard over our lands."

"While Canada's international actions often dominate headlines, the true measure of its commitment to justice lies in how it addresses longstanding issues here at home. It's time for governments to honor their commitments—past and present—and actively support the land back approach," said Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis Land Grievance and Indigenous Rights & Research Portfolio Lead Ratsénhaienhs Ross Montour. "The MCK calls on other First Nations to strengthen their support for the land back movement and push for the inclusion of land in specific claims policies."

The Federal Court has affirmed that the federal government must consider, in good faith, purchasing land and returning it to First Nations within the context of land claim settlement negotiations. The MCK insists that in order for governments to achieve reconciliation on the necessary scale, policy reforms must go further. The prioritization of returning land to Indigenous communities is supported by law, community needs, and numerous reports and studies.

The MCK recommends that Canada take steps to implement the return of land, including purchasing lands directly from third parties. The current policy's limitation that the federal government will not accept any settlement leading to third parties being dispossessed must be removed. The policy should explicitly state that the return of land will be prioritized over financial compensation for land and acknowledge the role that provinces must play in resolving specific claims when returning lands.

The MCK urges the governments of Canada and Quebec to take immediate action to implement these recommendations and prioritize the return of lands to Indigenous communities. Canadian citizens must hold their leadership accountable. With the upcoming federal election, it is time for Canada to address its internal responsibilities and ensure that the true caretakers of the land are recognized and respected.

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### **More information:**

The prioritization of returning land to Indigenous communities as the preferred means to resolve land grievances is founded in law and supported by the needs of communities, and numerous reports and studies, including:

- Articles 26 and 28 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, *Southwind v. Canada*, which identifies restitution in specie as the preferred means to compensate for breaches of fiduciary duty;
- AFN Resolution 12/2024 "Urgent Support for the Repatriation of First Nation Lands";
- INAN Report "We Belong to the Land" (p. 32-34, Recommendation 43);
- Recommendations from the National Claims Research Directors Engagement Report "Compounding Original Harms," September 2024 (p. 7, 8);
- the MCK has identified the return of land as the first priority for the 2024-2027 term, a priority also identified by our community members during engagement sessions; And
- the Previous CIRNAC Minister Miller identified the return of lands as a priority.

The MCK submits that the compensation criteria outlined in the Specific Claims Policy and Process Guide should be amended to prioritize restitution in specie and the return of lands. The policy should explicitly state that the return of land will be prioritized over financial compensation for land.

March 17, 2025 - [Letter sent to the Honourable Premier Francois Legault](#) in regard to the formal opposition of Chateauguay's Industrial Boulevard re-alignment and high-density residential development.

March 17, 2025 - [Letter sent to the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree](#) in regard to the formal opposition to Chateauguay's Industrial Boulevard re-alignment and high-density residential development.