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INDIAN NATIONS & NEIGHBORS COMMEMORATE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF TWO ROW WAMPUM TREATY

CANOE TRIP HIGHLIGHTS CAMPAIGN TO RAISE AWARENESS OF TREATY RESPONSIBILITIES, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

March 13, 2013 -- New York, NY-- Leaders of the Onondaga Nation, part of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, and Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) came to the Museum of the American Indian today to announce the beginning of a state-wide educational campaign, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum treaty signed with the Dutch. It was the first treaty signed between the Haudenosaunee and Europeans who were just beginning to settle in what they called the New World, and established diplomatic protocols that have lasted 400 years. The campaign is highlighted by an epic canoe trip this summer.

“The Two Row is the oldest and is the grandfather of all subsequent treaties,” said Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation’s Turtle Clan who has represented the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy in world councils at the United Nations and elsewhere.

“The words ‘as long as the sun shines, as long as the waters flow downhill, and as long as the grass grows green’ can be found in many treaties after the 1613 treaty,” Lyons said. “It set a relationship of equity and peace. This campaign is to remind people of the importance of the agreements.”

A two-week canoe trip from Albany to New York City, is scheduled to push off on July 28th to symbolize the separate but cooperative paths represented in the two rows of purple beads used in the wampum belt that records the treaty.

“Twenty-thirteen, the 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum agreement, is a good time to revisit together our past and future relationships both as peoples and nations,” said Tonya Gonella Frichner, an Onondaga who heads the American Indian Law Alliance.

--Information about the treaty's commemoration, and the planned canoe trip, are available at honorthetworow.org website

Sidney Hill is the Tadodaho, or spiritual leader, of the six-nation Haudenosaunee and lauded the fact that non-Indians will join the Indians in the journey from Albany to New York.

"We have always been told that when we make decisions that we have to look to seven generations and see how those decisions will affect those people," Hill said. "In the past few years, we have been connecting with the people, the grassroots people, the activists, the leadership, wherever we can, to do anything that will make the environment better than what it is now."

Jake Edwards, of the Onondaga Nation Council of Chiefs, said "What we hope to achieve in this journey is to educate the people so that they do their part, individually, as peoples, to protect mother earth and all the waters that flow for future generations."

Andy Mager, a leader in Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) and Project Coordinator for the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, said "We see the 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum as an opportunity to educate about our treaty obligations, Indigenous rights, and environmental issues, particularly regarding fracking and climate change."

The Haudenosaunee continue to work with their neighbors in New York to protect the environment, part of the Indian nation's commitment to look to future generations in their actions, as evidenced in their work to clean up Onondaga Lake and to warn about the threats posed by hydrofracking, the invasive and dangerous method of extracting the shale gas that sits beneath New York's Southern Tier, including the watershed that sustains the Onondaga Nation.

"Indian nations' agreements always were inclusive," said Lyons. "They encompass not only the human elements of life but all life. So protection of the commons was inherent in all these agreements. The commons are what belong to one and all - the air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we live on. And today, we see the necessity for those protections."