

**DRAFT: CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

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**The Conference:** AFOA National Conference, "Taking Control of Accountability: A Focus on Objectives, Performance and Results" "AFOA is pleased to invite you to attend the full conference as our guest." 20-22 February 2007. "We expect approximately 600 senior Aboriginal leaders from First Nations and Tribal Councils across the country – including financial managers, program managers, Band administrators, Chiefs and Council members.

**The Topic for one afternoon:** One afternoon of the conference is dedicated to the topic of "Self-Governance". There will be five different sessions going on simultaneously, each attended by 100-150 persons.

**The Session:** One of those sessions is on the topic of "Traditional Governance". It consists of a panel chaired by Satsan. Three will be four speakers, each allotted about 20 minutes. Other panel members are Darrell Boissoneau and Doreen Spence from the National Centre for First Nations Governance and Glenn Williams from the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs..

The promotion for this session reads, "First Nations governments are complex, dynamic organizations that move in a fast paced and modern world. When thinking about governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is there really a place for tradition and culture? We say yes. But many questions remain: How are First Nations using the principles and practices of tradition in modern contexts? What challenges are they facing in doing so? What is the cost? The National Centre for First Nations Governance will bring together a panel of First Nations experts from across Canada who have first-hand experiences to share with AFOA members."

**Notes from Kanentakeron:** "This seems like a Mom and apple pie issue to us in the Confederacy territory, but there really are so called successful communities who feel that culture and tradition is not integral in their governance. In other words, you have to think like a corporate man to be successful. I am expected to defend culture and tradition in modern day governance. .

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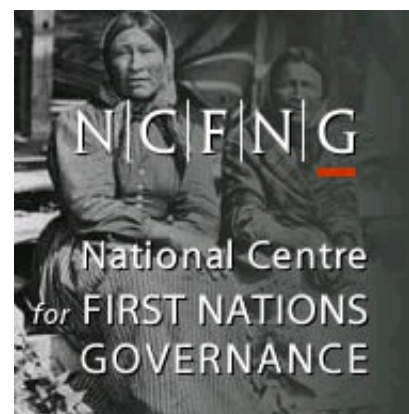


**Notes for Remarks by  
Kanentakeron (Mike Mitchell)**

**Panel on  
“The Role of Traditional Governance  
in Aboriginal Communities”**

**Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada  
National Conference  
“Taking Control of Accountability:  
A Focus on Objectives, Performance, and Results”**

**Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vancouver, B.C.  
3:30 - 5:00 p.m.,  
Wednesday, 21 February 2007**



## THE EVOLUTION OF GOVERNANCE IN AKWESASNE

Let me introduce myself.

My Mohawk name is Kanentakeron.

My English name is Michael K. Mitchell.

From the time of my youth I have been a Faithkeeper  
in the Longhouse of the Mohawk Nation.

I belong to the Wolf Clan and  
I was raised by traditional grandparents and parents.

My Mother today is a Clanmother  
of the traditional government of the Mohawk Nation.

It is because of my traditional knowledge  
that the Elders of the Longhouse asked me to run as Chief  
for the modern Elected Government under the *Indian Act*  
for our community of Akwesasne in 1982.



**Now up to this time, there had been a lot of animosity and hatred that existed between the Christians and the followers of the Longhouse spiritual tradition.**

**The division of the community also spread to followers of the traditional government and followers of the Indian Act elected system of government.**

**The Church also contributed in engendering hatred toward traditional people.**

**The Elders from the Longhouse felt that a traditional leader might help heal the longstanding wounds between the two factions by ressurecting traditional concepts of governance into the modern-day elected system.**

## HISTORY OF AKWESASNE

In 1899,  
Canada sent the Royal Dominion Police to Akwesasne  
to forcibly remove the traditional leaders from office.

John Ice Fire was a brother to Chief Jake Ice Fire –  
he was shot in cold blood  
while the rest of the Chiefs were rounded up and put in jail.

A notice was then posted on the Church Door  
that an election would be held,  
courtesy of the federal government.

This was how Canada brought democraacy to Akwesasne.

Before the imposition of the Elected system,  
the women Clan Leaders were responsible  
for selecting a Chief who would remain a leader  
as long as he was capable of serving the Nation  
with good moral standards of behaviour.



**If the longstanding divisions weren't enough, our Territory itself is further complicated by external borders.**

**The American Revolution created an international border running east and west, leaving half of Akwesasne in the United States and the other half in what was then British North America.**

**Later, the boundary line running generally north and south separating Upper Canada and Lower Canada became the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, leaving the Canadian portion divided in half again.**

**The mighty St. Lawrence River flows through the middle, and other rivers flow through our territory into it.**

**There are parts of our territory “on the Canadian side” that can be reached only by driving through “the American side”.**

**Today there are roughly 20,000 Mohawks on both sides of the border at Akwesasne.**

**Over 10,000 are on the membership rolls of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on what we call “the Canadian side”, and the remaining portion belong on the rolls of the St. Regis Tribal Council on what we call the American side, all of it in Mohawk territory. .**

**The traditional government of the Mohawk Nation still exists, so in actuality there are three Mohawk governments that have to deal with two provinces, one state and two countries.**

**The Mohawks of Akwesasne have an interesting story to tell about governance in Canada!**

**And about traditional government in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**



**This is my introduction, this is my story.**

**I am a traditional person, and  
I have served the majority of the last 25 years  
as Grand Chief and District Chief  
for the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne,  
the Elected government on the Canadian side of the territory.**

**This community government has undergone great changes  
in its governance style and structure over this period of time.**

**I want to share with you my views and experiences  
on this evolution of governance in Akwesasne.**

## TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE

**Traditional governance is not something that can be written in the form of a research document with steps and directions on implementation.**

**Traditional governance involves culture, language, honor, and respect for family, community and nation.**

**It has been said that the mothers of the various clans knew how to choose their future leaders by watching the children from early childhood to the time of young adulthood when they began to provide for their families.**

**A man would be selected to carry the title of Chief by the women because he had already demonstrated high standards of character, moral and ethical behaviour and strong leadership qualities before his people.**

**He would remain a Chief as long as he held these qualities; he would no longer be chief when he ceased to demonstrate them**

**This is one hallmark of traditional governance, the essence of traditional governance.**



**Many of us have had the experience of being leaders in the elected system under the Indian Act.**

**It is a system of governance that promotes division, hatred, jealousy and alienation of culture and tradition.**

**As an elected leader in my community, I quickly realized that I had to involve some traditional values in the elected system or become satisfied with being part of a subjugated, hierarchical system of governance.**

**Final decisions on a community matters would always rest with the Department of Indian Affairs and ultimately with the Minister if no changes were made to empower the people.**

**I became a leader of a community in 1982 that was then known as the St. Regis Reserve.**

**The council was called the St. Regis Band Council and the chain of command for the community started at the district office of DIAND in Peterborough, moved upward to the Regional Office in Toronto, and ended finally in Ottawa with the national headquarters of the Department of Indian Affairs.**

At that time, 1982,  
the St. Regis Band Council operated with a budget  
of approximately five million dollars  
and had a deficit of close to two million dollars  
with DIAND poised to place the community  
into what they called “third party management,”  
another way to say,  
“Bring back the Indian Agent to the St. Regis Indians.”

The governance language and mentality of the day  
spoke in terms of Band Chief, Band Council,  
Band programs, Band Office and Band administration.

The followers of the elected system hated the proponents  
of the Longhouse traditional government system  
and regarded them as backward pagans.

There was no thought of nation-building in 1982  
because we were too colonized  
by external government authorities.



## NATION BUILDING IN AKWESASNE

**I became the Head Chief of the St. Regis Band Council in 1984.**

**One of the first actions on my part was to ban the use of the word "Band."**

**In all of our council meetings if anyone mentioned the word "Band," he or she would have to donate a quarter to a coffee cup fund.**

**It quickly became a game that was adopted by all levels of programs and services.**

**Nation building had begun.**

**The St. Regis Band Council underwent a legal name change to become "the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne".**

**The "St. Regis Reserve" became "the Mohawk Territory of Akwesasne".**

**The "Band Administrator" became known as the "Chief Administrative Officer".**

Those changes of the way we spoke about ourselves were important, but the changes went deeper than that.

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne became the government of the community of Akwesasne.

As the government of Akwesasne, of our community, the Mohawk Council then passed a resolution recognizing the Mohawk Nation Traditional Council as the historic National government.

“MCA” as we call it, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, made a community flag to fly alongside the Nation flag.

The pride of tradition slowly came back to the community of Akwesasne.

MCA designed its own management system, and retired the deficit within three years by taking over control and management of programs and services from DIAND.

We enlisted the community, the Mohawk residents, to take ownership of the process.



**Over the next ten years, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne gained control of Health, Justice, Policing, Environment, Conservation, Education, Housing and Economic Development.**

**With the support of the Traditional Government, the Mohawk Nation Traditional Council, a community referendum was held to opt out of the Indian Act election system and to bring forward a community controlled election.**

**Another referendum was held on membership issues with a view to taking control over community membership.**

**Twenty years later, the Mohawk Council operates with an annual budget of \$65 million, has an internal financial system that discourages deficits, and has a community reporting system that provides for fiscal accountability directly to the membership.**

**With the traditional and elected leadership working together, a twenty-year-old land claim was settled with the State of New York resulting in a return of land to Mohawk ownership and an accompanying financial settlement.**

**These actions and planning strategies have been my experience in building our community and building our nation.**

**Utilizing our traditional knowledge, we facilitated community growth, taking pride in our identity as Haudenosaunee citizens.**

**We secured stability with community justice and policing.**

**We implemented strong cultural and language programming into our education system.**

**These are among many hallmarks of the entire process.**

**It has not been an easy road to success.**

**The international borders and state and provincial boundaries in our area make it easier for international crime to operate, have made international crime easier to accomplish and have caused illegal operations to compete with legal economies causing major crises and setbacks to community stability and growth to happen about every ten years.**

**But through it all, the community has endured because of the cultural strength we have regained.**



**I have shared my experiences with other First Nations who are searching for ways to have their own traditional governance and structures play more significant roles, to have authority and jurisdiction.**

**I believe that traditional governance is not just a philosophy or an ideology about making ancient and timeless systems workable in modern times.**

**Traditional governance is not a topic that can be researched and made into a two-dimensional diagram without ever coming to life.**

**Pilot projects are necessary to explore new avenues.**

**Interactive workshops are crucial to create deep dialogue among community leadership.**

**Community focus groups on specific topics give voice to community members who need to buy into the process.**

**Strategy sessions and action planning are the natural outcomes of such workshops.**

**Traditional governance is an educational process as much about politicising the First Nations as it is about the depth of wisdom in ancient ways waiting to be explored and put to use.**

**Case studies are useful for interested First Nations to review.**

**They encourage community involvement and participation.**

**They provide a reflection of the current state of development in a particular community where one can see the degree of cultural match in using tradition to govern in a modern context.**

**This information can then be used to create entities for governance that benefit everyone.**

**The involvement of youth and Elders is crucial to the entire process for the wisdom and energy they can provide and for the continuance of the efforts once the studies are over.**



## OUR CHALLENGE AS NATIONS

**Is it possible for First Nations to build our governance around the teachings of our ancestors with culture, language and tradition as the cornerstone of our future existence?**

**Is it possible to take on the challenge of establishing an economic strategy that respects and honours Mother Earth when addressing the social and economic needs of a community and ultimately the entire Nation?**

**We can live in a modern world without surrendering the Sacred Teachings of our Ancestors.**

**We live in a time when Human Societies of the World are at a crossroads which will lead to a future existence or which will cause them to perish.**

**We First Nations are also now at the crossroads of our existence.**

**If our leaders want our Nations to survive, they must consider abandoning the European model of governance because it does not belong to us.**

**We must move away from the welfare mentality and the destructive dependency of the *Indian Act* that has engulfed us over the past century and a half.**

**I believe this is the only way to rebuild our Nations.**



**The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association is interested in excellence in effective management.**

**You are interested in capacity building, competence.**

**You are interested in professionalism, innovation.**

**You are interested in high standards, accountability.**

**You are interested in best practices, excellence.**

**None of these are in the least contradictory to traditional governance!**

**In fact, traditional governance would add to the list:**

- **high standards of participatory democracy;**
- **insistence that leaders are servants of the people;**
- **total involvement of men, women, youth, elders;**
- **consensus-building that leads to unity and action.**

**Let's put an end to the "bad press"  
that traditional governance is something  
that is incompatible with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,  
incompatible with democracy,  
incompatible with professional administration.**

**Let's understand that "traditional governance"  
is the answer to many of the problems  
our nations face today.**

**For any government,  
there is always the question of relationship.**

**Centuries ago, the people decided  
how their governments would relate  
to the families, to the clans;**

**how their governments would relate  
to the medicine societies, the men's organizations, the  
women's groups, with confederacies and nations.**

**The same principle applies today:  
how should our traditional governance relate  
to health authorities;  
to specialized administrations such as school boards;  
how and who to handle relationships  
with outside governments.**

**This is standard for any government,  
but if it is going to work for us,  
it has to be custom-made;  
it has to have the support of the people.**



**Traditional governance recognizes that we are made up of family-based collectives.**

**This means that every family has representation.**

**We don't just pretend that families don't exist, that we are just a mass of unrelated individuals.**

**Traditionally, our governments are composed of families, and every family large and small has representation.**

**But what if some families are very large and others very small, you might ask?**

**They all are represented just the same, because unity, solidarity, is very important to us.**

**We make that possible by making our decisions by consensus.**

**It's not as quick as raising your hands and the side with the most wins – even if it is 52% versus 48%.**

**Consensus means compromise, listening, accommodating, making sure everyone's needs are met.**

**Restoring traditional governance to its rightful place is not a peculiarly Canadian problem.**

**It is a problem of any peoples who have been the subject of colonialism.**

**Just removing colonial controls is not enough.  
Colonialism leaves festering wounds.  
Colonialism leaves ugly scars.  
Colonialism creates bad habits  
for both the colonized and the colonizer.**

**When I say “restoring traditional governance”, I am not talking about going back to the way things were in 1492.**

**Had it not been for colonialism, traditional government would have evolved, adapted, changed in the same way that has happened in Britain and Canada – remember that for British countries, parliamentary democracy is deeply traditional.**

**The constant that keeps traditional government “traditional” are the values, the principles, the way the people see the world.**



**For us, for the indigenous peoples of this land,  
there is another word for “traditional government”.**

**That word is “appropriate government”.**

**For us, our communities are not like rural towns and villages  
of the Canadian variety.**

**Our communities, our people, have deep ties to the place  
where the Creator put us thousands of years ago.**

**We are still there, and we are still here**

**We want to be there a thousand years from now.**

**Wherever our travels might take us,  
we want to be buried there, with our roots,  
with our ancestors.**

**Our communities are family-based,  
collections of interrelated inter-generational families.**

**Our governance is not only for today,  
it is for the seventh generation  
whose faces are coming toward us.**

If we have cookie-cutter governments  
just like those which are standard practice in Canada,  
if we do not have governments  
which reflect the ways we are different,  
we will have governments which don't work,  
governments which are undemocratic.

We must have governments which are appropriate,  
which are custom made for us.

And our traditional governments  
are our best starting places  
for us to "go back to the future".