



Tsiothohrko:wa/January 15, 2021

Open Letter to Our Neighbours

On behalf of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, we hope that our neighbours are in good health and staying safe.

It has come to our attention that Akwesasne community members have received harassing messages left on their vehicles when shopping outside of our community. Therefore, we offer this clarification on our rights, to promote further awareness amongst our neighbours.

The Akwesasne Mohawk Territory is situated directly on the US-Canada border, as our community was settled in this area *prior to* the line being drawn. The borders that have been put in place dissected Akwesasne into three jurisdictions (from a map or government perspective), and the result is that Mohawks of Akwesasne reside within Ontario (Cornwall Island), Quebec (Snye and St. Regis) and New York State (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe jurisdiction). It's a "jurisdictional nightmare" that often creates hardship for our community members, can be difficult to explain to others, and for anyone who was previously unaware, it can be understandably challenging to fully comprehend.

The Mohawks of Akwesasne have dual citizenship, meaning that we are considered to be citizens of both the United States and Canada. We have the right, both inherently and legally, to live, work, and travel in both countries. Our community members visit surrounding communities, such as Cornwall, Ontario, Massena, NY, and Malone, New York, to purchase groceries, access health care services, do our banking, and to report to work. As a result of our dual citizenship and the jurisdictional complications we face daily, our community members purchase and register vehicles in Ontario, Quebec, and New York. We have the right to live in any part of Akwesasne, despite the borders that have been put in place.

This explains why, even with a closed border and travel restrictions in effect, you will continue to see our vehicles with New York or Quebec license plates in Cornwall, and with Ontario and Quebec license plates in Massena and Malone. During this difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic, our community members are visiting your town for essential reasons, in support of local economies, and with every right to do so.

The harassment that has recently been experienced by our community members is unacceptable. We certainly hope that ignorance and misunderstanding was the root cause of this behavior, and not racism. We trust that this letter, providing clarification to you, our neighbour, is well received and serves its purpose - to increase your awareness of the rights of the Mohawks of Akwesasne.

The pandemic continues to be a stressful and difficult situation. Goodwill and compassion are needed by everyone at this time. Our community members share the common goal to survive this pandemic, with kindness and respect for our fellow humans.

Sken:nen/Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Abram Benedict".

Abram Benedict
Grand Chief