

Kanien'kehá:ka Youth in Kahnawà:ke take stand against proposed Bill 96 legislation

(Kahnawake – 20, Onerahtohkó:wa/May 2022) The Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) Youth of Kahnawà:ke are issuing a formal declaration to the Quebec Government that they strongly oppose Bill 96, *An Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Quebec*, which is being proposed by the Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) aimed at strengthening the *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101).

Firstly, the Kanien'kehá:ka are, and always have been, a sovereign nation within this Territory. We are the original people of this land and have always maintained our assertion that we are the sole caretakers of our territory, our culture and our language. Regardless of centuries of colonial impositions placed on our people, we remain strong, defiant and proud of who we are as Onkwehón:we (original people). We hold our elders, families, cultural warriors, and Kanien'ké:ha (Mohawk language) speakers in the highest regard.

While Bill 96 is portrayed as a proposal to enhance French language and culture, it is yet another legislative policy that places more barriers in the way of our future and on all that we value. It is designed to advance Quebec nationalism, while it forces the destruction of our nationhood by minimalizing efforts that our people have made towards the revitalization of our culture and language.

“Quebec, like we, has every right to protect their beloved language and culture, but it must not come at the expense of others... the Kanien'kehá:ka, other Indigenous people, and anyone else who speak languages other than French,” said spokesperson on behalf of the Kanien'kehá:ka Youth, Teiotsatonteh Diabo. “The way that this legislation elevates the French language through force not only disregards the rights of other cultures and languages, it is an outright attack against everyone but the French.”

While government officials claim the implications of the Bill are seemingly minor, experts are clearly proving there is potential for devastating impacts that will create even more barriers for Indigenous people. It will become increasingly difficult to pursue higher education by having to take more courses in French, it severely limits our choices to enter into professional orders unless we speak French, and accessing government and business services will become extremely difficult if we do not have the choice of reading, writing or speaking in the language of our choice.

“Many youth are already concerned that if this Bill passes, they will be forced to go to college, or work out of province because they won't be able to communicate in French,” continued Diabo. “We will see more failures in the education system, lower grade scores and less opportunity to get into programs at a university level. I do not wish this on myself, my peers, or anyone else.”

The proposed legislation is a direct attack on peaceful relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. We need only look at the history of the original Two-Row Wampum Treaty our ancestors had with the settlers. The two lines in the wampum represent the two distinct peoples: the canoe (Indigenous), and the ship (non-Indigenous). At no time do the vessels ever cross paths, which is symbolic to the ideology that the affairs of one do not ever interfere with the other. Continual oppressive policies like this Bill not only violate that treaty, but it does so at the expense of, yet again, our people.

What we as the collective must understand, is that we are navigating the same waters, and that we always have to be mindful of the affairs of others. Failure by the CAQ to genuinely and appropriately consult with our people is a total disregard to Indigenous self-determination, a total disregard for Indigenous cultures and languages, and a clear violation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Kanien'kehá:ka Youth of Kahnawà:ke are demanding a stop to this legislation. We have mobilized to ensure every effort is taken to protect the futures of our youth, and of the seven generations to come. We are at a crossroad where, we as Kanien'kehá:ka, our neighboring anglophones, Quebecois and every other ally, must take a stance to do what is right. It's time to change the colonial assimilative legacy that this country has practiced for centuries. It's time to come together and take a stand. Say NO to Bill 96.

We call upon our brothers and sisters, our neighboring communities, our friends and allies to join us, as we send our message to the proponents of this legislation. At 9:30am on Saturday, May 21st, the Kanien'kehá:ka Youth, backed by the community of Kahnawà:ke, will be holding a peaceful march within our territory. We aim to educate, while sending a strong message that we will not stand idly by while we are faced with imposition.

This march is but the beginning of the type of action we will take until our voices are heard, our concerns are considered, and our right to exist without interference is respected. We will not stop until we have resolution, we will not stand down.

Respectfully,

The Kanien'kehá:ka Youth of Kahnawà:ke

Media Inquiries:

Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke Public Relations
mckmedia@mck.ca

On behalf of:

Teiotsatonteh Diabo
Spokesperson
Kanien'kehá:ka Youth of Kahnawà:ke