

Specific Goals of the Onondaga Nation Land Rights Action

The following is from the Onondaga Nation Communications Office. Check out website for wonderful detail and background [www.onondaganation.org].



- To achieve a healing with our neighbors of the centuries of difficulties caused by the illegal taking of Onondaga and Haudenosaunee lands.
- To restore to the Onondaga Nation recognition of title to its aboriginal territory.
- To recover possession of portions of this territory from New York State and willing sellers for the use of the Onondaga people.
- To secure a continuing source of revenue from the Nation's lands without displacing persons from the land.
- To secure revenues and land sufficient to achieve economic self-sufficiency, including:
 - ◆ An adequate supply of quality housing
 - ◆ A quality education system
 - ◆ Affordable, quality health care
 - ◆ Sound and sustainable agricultural programs
 - ◆ Programs for the proper care of elders and youth
 - ◆ A program for environmental restoration and protection
 - ◆ Employment opportunities for the Nation and its neighbors
- To protect and conserve the natural resources within and affecting the Nation's land, as a means of safeguarding all citizens' rights to a natural, healthy environment.
- To obtain recognition of the basic rights of the Onondaga Nation, including those rights agreed upon in treaties with the United States.
- To secure Onondaga rights to hunt, fish and gather for subsistence and for cultural needs.
- To secure adequate protection for the burial sites of our ancestors, as well as other important sacred and archeological sites.
- To resolve all ongoing conflicts with the state and federal governments, particularly regarding taxation and jurisdiction.
- To provide for the growth and perpetuation of Onondaga culture, language, laws, religion, and way of life.

Voices from the Onondaga Nation

We believe in our hearts that we are the environment. Just like the plants, the animals... We've got a lot of work to do. We can't do it ourselves... We've got to all work together on this.

—Onondaga Chief Jake Edwards

In some ways, it [filing the Onondaga Land Rights Action] feels like a culmination of all these generations of people. I have seen tears for the elders . . . Some of them would say, 'I wonder if this will ever happen?'

—Audrey Shenandoah

We know what it's like to lose our land... Displacement is something we wouldn't want to put on anyone because our ancestors have suffered from it.

—Onondaga Tadadaho Sid Hill

The women of our community have decided that it is time to act. It is time to clean up our mother.

—Onondaga Chief Bradley Powless

Onondaga Nation Land Rights Action FACTSHEET



- The Onondaga Nation seeks justice – New York State took its land illegally and needs to acknowledge its right to the land. The Onondagas have consistently asserted their right to the land for over 200 years.
- The Onondagas intend to use their right to the land as a legal and moral force for the Earth – to clean up polluted areas and protect areas which remain clean.
- The theft of Onondaga land and mistreatment of the people and their culture was wrong. The Onondagas don't want to perpetuate that wrong as they seek redress. They have pledged that no one will be evicted from their homes.
- For over two centuries the Onondaga people have suffered great hardship. They seek to achieve greater self-sufficiency with their land rights action while contributing to Central New York's economic development.

Federal Treaties and New York State "Agreements"

- The 1784 Fort Stanwix Treaty between the Six Nations and the US protected Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) land – including Onondaga territory.
- The US Constitution, adopted in 1789, grants exclusive jurisdiction over Indian affairs to Congress, preventing states from acquiring Indian land without federal approval.
- The "agreements" through which New York State claims it acquired Onondaga lands between 1788 and 1822 violated federal laws and treaties. The Onondaga Nation did not approve these agreements (nor the 1788-1790 Fort Schuyler agreement). New York State grabbed whomever they could to sign these documents.

Onondaga Lake

- From time immemorial the ancestors of the Onondaga have lived on the shores of Onondaga Lake.
- A century of degradation caused by callous corporations and indifferent government officials has transformed the Lake from an asset to a toxic liability.
- The recently proposed Onondaga Lake clean-up plan will not remove all of the toxic waste that has

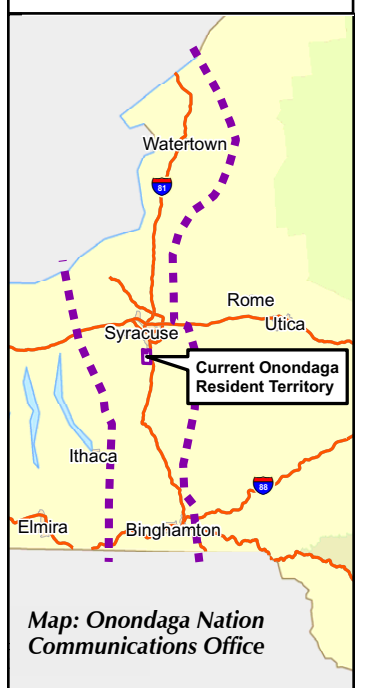
drained, and continues to drain, into the Lake from over a dozen Superfund sites.

- The Onondagas were not consulted, as required by Federal law, when the proposed clean-up plan was finalized.

Onondaga Nation

- Of their original land area of 2.6 million acres, the Onondagas now control only 7,300 acres.
- The Onondaga Nation lies at the center of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a model of participatory democracy.
- The Onondagas served as an inspiration to European colonists working to build democratic structures and to women's rights advocates who admired the gender equality in Onondaga culture.

Approximate Area of the Onondaga Nation's aboriginal territory



Map: Onondaga Nation Communications Office

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We have been wrongly educated by history books, literature and movies to accept an incorrect narrative of historical events, couched in negative stereotypes of Native people. These stereotypes are based in fear and racism.

NOON seeks to help make right the historic wrongs done to the Onondaga people. We urge our neighbors, the people of Central New York, to listen carefully to what the Onondagas are saying to us, and to respond honestly and without fear.

We understand that the Onondagas will sue no individual and that they seek no action against any individual property owner. Our homes are not in jeopardy. No one will be evicted. We thank the Onondagas for their effort – furthered by this land rights action – to restore and protect the water, land and air from the devastating effects of industrial pollution. We thank them for seeking to heal our wounds, environmentally and socially.

Acting Side by Side

Together, we have little choice but to act decisively to restore health to the environment which knows no legal boundaries. The land rights action has been taken by the Onondagas not only on their own behalf but on behalf of all humans, animals and plant life who share this dangerously polluted water, land and air. These are also our environmental concerns, and we pledge our support for a fair resolution to this legal action.

Remarkable strength of character and conviction are evident as the Onondagas step forward to present not only the legal aspects of this action, but also the human concerns. Despite the anger and humiliation they must feel, given the historic wrongs suffered by their ancestors and

which continue to cause suffering today, the Onondagas speak to us from a place of compassion. They seek reconciliation and healing. It is an example to all of us, and especially to our children as they witness this historic moment.

We can have a win-win outcome if the Onondaga's concern for cleaning up the environment moves us to take our share of responsibility and act. We all stand to benefit – humanly, morally, and practically. The environmental dangers we face already threaten our health, and will soon threaten our survival. The environment has no geographic borders. The Onondaga Nation's land rights action offers us an opportunity to move beyond our mis-education to become active participants in creating a just resolution to these past and ongoing wrongs.

The Onondagas have taught us about the two row wampum. The Onondaga land rights action offers us an opportunity to try to honor the historic agreement it represents. This time, instead of violating a promise to respect each other's land and traditions, we can peacefully travel – side by side – on a journey to heal the historic injustices against the Onondaga people and the environmental damage that affects us all.

The Onondagas have made their move. It's up to us to do our part to change the priorities of our state and nation from short-sighted protection of corporate profit to care for the quality of human life, now and in the generations to follow.

—Carole Resnick / Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation



Buttons available for \$1 from the Syracuse Peace Council.

ONONDAGA NATION LAND RIGHTS



*Information for
Neighbors of the
Onondaga Nation*

The Onondaga Nation, seat of the Haudenosaunee, or Six Nations Confederacy, is acknowledged as having the oldest continuous participatory and democratic government in the world (dating back 1,000-2,000 years). Onondaga leaders have been recognized as valued participants in the proceedings of the United Nations. This sovereign and distinct nation of people was indigenous to this area before Europeans arrived. They are the “next door neighbor” to those of us who live in Syracuse and nearby towns.

The Onondagas have long considered asserting their right to land taken from them illegally. The Land Rights Action they filed in US federal court on March 11, 2005 is introduced with a clear statement of their intent:

The Onondaga Nation hopes to bring about a healing between

the Onondaga people and others who live in this area that has been the homeland of the Onondaga people since the dawn of time. The Onondagas have a unique spiritual, cultural and historic relationship with this land which bears no resemblance to legal concepts of ownership, possession or other legal rights. The Nation intends that this suit may be a step toward reconciliation, lasting justice, peace and respect among all who inhabit this region.

Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) seeks to promote understanding of and respect for the Onondaga people and culture within the broader Central New York community; to educate ourselves and others about the history of the relations between the US and the Onondaga Nation; to challenge racism towards

native peoples; and to work with the Onondaga Nation on matters of mutual concern. Their land rights action against New York State, Onondaga county, and the city of Syracuse is a matter of great mutual concern.

History and Healing

Among the debts we owe to the Haudenosaunee is their model of participatory democracy. They shared it with the founders of our nation, who in turn used it as a source of inspiration for the US Constitution. Recognizing and appreciating this legacy, we urge the court to respond favorably to the land rights suit and to open the door for the long-term efforts necessary to heal the relationships between our local, regional and national communities with the sovereign Onondaga Nation.

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What We Can Do:

Show your support for our neighbors, the Onondagas, by:

- Educating ourselves and others. Materials are available at SPC or on the web: [www.peacecouncil.net/noon].
- Learning more and/or getting involved at a NOON (Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation) meeting on **Monday, June 13 at 7 pm** at the Westcott Day Hab Center, 522 Westcott St., Syracuse.
- Signing NOON's statement of support (on Peace Council web site).
- Writing a letter to the editor of the *Post-Standard*, *New Times* or other publication.
- Speaking up in everyday conversation. Challenge racism and misinformation and respond respectfully to peoples' fear.
- Clarifying that the people of the Onondaga Nation have stated that they will not evict anyone.
- Emphasizing the Onondaga focus on cleaning up the environment which we all share.
- Inviting NOON to make a presentation to groups with which you're involved.
- Attending public craft fairs or other cultural events at the Nation.

Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation, 924 Burnet Ave., 472-5478

email: noon@peacecouncil.net or web: www.peacecouncil.net/noon

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