

INTRODUCTION TO LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Disclaimer: This resource is not a sufficient substitute for anti-oppressive practices training and personal initiative as well as research that is required in understanding these issues.

What is a land acknowledgement?

A land acknowledgement is one small action in the process of decolonization, where the indigenous inhabitants of the land are recognized at the start of an event or meeting. It allows the ongoing systematic oppression of Indigenous peoples to be brought to the forefront of our minds, even if for a brief moment, to further reconciliation work. We encourage all groups who are serious about reconciliation to adopt land acknowledgments while understanding that it is simply one action, and should be where anti-oppression work starts, not ceases.

Why are they important?

For many people, colonialism is an issue of the past, which makes land acknowledgements more important than ever. It is difficult to see one's role in colonialism when it is discarded as history. However, even as a recent immigrant from perhaps a previously colonized country, for example, there is a need for participation in decolonization. Your current presence on colonized land means that you are inherently benefiting from an oppressive system and allowing for the gross inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples to persist.

Indigenous Understanding of Land Ownership

Before committing your group to land acknowledgments, you should seek to understand the relationship Indigenous peoples have to land. In the Western context, land is often considered a commodity where one can buy it, lease it, and inhabit it with a sense of ownership. The relationship to land is about being able to build shelter or businesses on it, typically a one-sided relationship of taking. In the case of Indigenous groups, the relationship to land is more intimate

and connected to the spiritual, cultural, social well-being of Indigenous peoples. This way of knowing the land creates a sense of responsibility for taking care of it, for considering how the land can own you, and is a dynamic relationship with all those who engage with it. Therefore, the land acknowledgement shows respect for the Indigenous relationship with land and should come with a commitment from your group to also reflect on your relationship with the land. In what ways are you giving and connected to the land? In the current sense, that can refer to environmental sustainability, but the sacred relationship Indigenous peoples have goes beyond that as their oral tradition and cultural practices are dependent on the land. Here, we highlight a general concept, but it is essential to realize that the relationship Indigenous peoples have to their land differs across nations and should be understood based on the context of the group you are acknowledging.

Haudenosaunee Confederacy

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy refers to the people of the longhouse. It came into being with the support of the Peacemaker and brought together the nations of Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, and the Tuscarora joined later. Their goal of harmonious living is carried out by allowing each nation to maintain autonomy through its own council and having a Grand Council to manage affairs that are collectively important to the nations. The Haudenosaunee is one of the first and continues to be the longest lasting participatory democracy globally. Locally, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is present with the the Grand River of the Six Nations reserve near the City of Hamilton.

Dish with One Spoon Wampum

Wampum belts are how the Haudenosaunee people bind laws and agreements; they have significance in ceremonies and are sacred. The patterns and symbols used on the wampum correspond to an agreement and ensure that it is respected. The Dish with One Spoon Wampum

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was created to bind the great law of peace between the nations part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The principle behind the Dish with One Spoon is to represent the land where the nations hunt as the dish; since there is one spoon, the nations have to equally share the land in order to create peace. There is also an affirmation that no knife should go near the dish to prevent bloodshed. Overall, the nations of the confederacy are expected to eat together from one dish, the land, without any sharp objects, to have peaceful coexistence.

Anishinabe

The Anishinabe includes the Ojibway, Chippewa, Mississauga, and Algonquin who historically inhabited the lands at the mouth of the Mississauga river, leading into Lake Huron. They experienced migration in the 17th century, and some settled in present-day Toronto/south-western Ontario. Over time due to European settlement in the 18th century, the Anishinabe were further constrained for land. Currently, the Anishinabe are present with the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Aamjiwnaang, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point in south-western Ontario.

General tips when giving acknowledgement

1. In order to do the acknowledgement appropriately, it should not be rushed. This means not neglecting it in the case an event is running late to start. The acknowledgement should be prioritized and the person delivering it should be given time, as well as the respectful attention of the audience.
2. It is not a checklist item on an event agenda but rather an opportunity for a conversation if the audience is receptive. Hence, it may be a good idea depending on the context to open up the floor after the acknowledgement for questions or comments.
3. As to who should deliver the land acknowledgement, it is appropriate for an

event organizer or the chair of a meeting to do so.

4. A land acknowledgement should be done in all cases, regardless of the size of a meeting or event and independent of the presence of Indigenous people at the event.

An Example Land Acknowledgement

I would like to take this time to recognize that we are currently on the traditional territory shared between the Haudenosaunee (ho - din - oh - show - knee) confederacy and the Anishinabe (ah - nih - shih - nah - bai) nations, which was acknowledged in the Dish with One Spoon wampum belt. That wampum uses the symbolism of a dish to represent the territory, and one spoon to represent that the people are to share the resources of the land and only take what they need.

Beyond Land Acknowledgements

As aforementioned, land acknowledgments are one step in active allyship, and committed reconciliation is continuous. Highlighted below are some suggested next steps but are not comprehensive; you should always take personal initiative to further your learning and unlearning when it comes to anti-oppression activism.

Educate yourself: first and foremost, it is important to be consistently furthering your understanding. There are various resources online, in libraries, and your respective community that you can access. You should also try to keep up with current issues as you may be able to take a more active role if you are aware of them.

Foster relationships by engaging with Indigenous people. Indigenous groups such as student groups or community organizations are quite welcoming to non-Indigenous folks and if you are respectful, are happy to have your support. Solidarity is about standing side by side and giving voice to those who need to be heard. Hence, listening is essential to fostering these relationships.

Too often we stay silent, and this is often an act of complacency in oppressive systems. Anti-

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oppressive work requires raising your voice when it is needed, not simply when it is convenient. Sometimes taking a position to support Indigenous rights on an issue is not a matter of politics but justice; staying neutral is also taking a position in itself. Activism can take on various forms, from educating others to non-violent protest.

Resources used and recommended for further reading:

Meaning of Land to Aboriginal People: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/meaning-of-land-to-aboriginal-people>

First Nation Relationship to the Land: <http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nation-relationship-to-the-land>

Wampum holds power of earliest agreements: <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/wampum-holds-power-earliest-agreements>

Haudenosaunee: <https://canadianhistoryworkshop.wordpress.com/indigenous-people-encounter-europeans/haudenosaunee/>

Haudenosaunee Confederacy: <http://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/contactus.html>

Six Nations: <http://www.sixnations.ca/SNGlobalSolutionsBookletFinal.pdf>

Dish With One Spoon: <http://www.indiantime.net/story/2010/08/05/cultural-corner/the-dish-with-one-spoon/7510.html>

Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements: <http://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>