

# WHY THE SPIRIT OF ELDER AND WARRIOR HARRIET NAHANEÉ IS REVERED BY THE INDIGENOUS ANTI-OLYMPICS MOVEMENT

In respect of our ancestors, to those of us not born, and those of us not here, we relate the teachings of our Elders and those who have moved on to their non-physical forms, to our daily modern lives. We are taught to acknowledge whose land we live and rest on and to remember the struggles of those who came before us who worked hard to protect the ground, the waters and the winds.

In all of our Indigenous traditions, there are stories of creation, catastrophe and struggle. It is our duty, we are told, to remember these stories, known as our 'adaawk' in Gitksan, so that our history and knowledge will continue to survive and evolve, even in the face of adversarial dismissal, objection and criminalization of who we are. Gitksan Elders have described how the word lippygyet is translated in English to mean the 'freedom to be who we are'. This concept is something the Canadian government refuses to recognize: That we are Indigenous people whom according to our adaawk, have been placed within our traditional territories from the beginning of our existence as a people. When an Elder stands on her land and says, "we belong to this land", that truth forms our Indigenous law, and delineates our Original ownership to it, which neither a colonial system nor its agents can de-legitimize. Indigenous people have asserted inherent freedoms and sacred rights to defend their land from colonial and capitalist invasion for hundreds of years. And the incursion of the 2010 Olympic circus into Indigenous communities is simply a continuation of aggressive colonial development that also warrants resistance.

While Olympic organizers wine and dine First Nations Chiefs and band councillors in fancy hotels and restaurants to win their hearts to the fanfare of the games, Indigenous anti-Olympic organizers continue to expose the true embryonic realities of the Games. The Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) currently occupies, exploits and profits from Indigenous lands and intends to maximize its profit margin by attracting national and international investment pertaining to the games in 2010. Their profits have already disrupted Native lands and communities unequivocally. But Native people are fighting back.

The Secwepemc of Skwel'kwel'welt, the Stat'imc of Sutikalh, the Pilalt of Cheam, and the Nlaka'Pamux of the Merritt area have been at the forefront of the struggle to confront and halt Olympic-related mega-development including destructive ski-

resort construction and expansion on their lands. Instead of watching their mountains, sacred sites, hunting and fishing grounds become parking lots and condos, Native people have done what our ancestors and Elders advise us to do, resist and refuse colonial encroachment and contempt. In the city, Indigenous people have challenged VANOC's aggravation of abject poverty and homelessness resulting from the race to accommodate Olympic athletes, foreign investment and trade, and hungry capitalist visitors (tourists) leading up to and in 2010.

Indigenous anti-Olympic resistance has been characterized by the building of protection camps, blockading roads, occupying buildings, disrupting VANOC events, removing VANOC property including a 16 by 25 foot Olympic flag, and gaining grassroots, national and international support against the environmental and human rights violations wreaked by VANOC and the Canadian and provincial governments. The work done by Indigenous people to end the Olympics 2010 has not gone unnoticed.

Yet it was one small, but powerful woman who catapulted the exposé of the 2010 games. The tragic death of esteemed Elder Harriet Nahanee (Thitspa7s) sparked deep empathy to her plight, not only in mourning the loss of her life, but in the realization of our loss of land, dignity and freedoms that the Olympic machine takes.

Harriet was a 72-year old Pacheedaht grandmother, Elder, and an Indigenous Warrior who had married into the Skwxwu7mesh (Squamish) Nation. She was one of the only Indigenous protesters working to protect the Eagle Ridge Bluffs site slated to be destroyed in the expansion of the sea to sky highway that will pave the way to the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Whistler.

For asserting her Indigenous rights and for refusing to apologize for her blockade action, on January 24th, 2007, despite her frail health, Harriet was sentenced to fourteen days in the Surrey Pretrial Centre, a men's prison and a notorious hell-hole for women. Advocates and friends of Harriet described her experience in prison, where she was forced to live with 26 other women in a cell, as violent, racist and abusive. When medical attention was requested, only a psychiatrist was offered.

While serving her horrific prison sentence Harriet Nahanee contracted pneumonia. She was hospitalized after serving nine days of her sentence and passed away within a week subsequent to her hospitalization.

There is no justification in the incarceration and resulting death of esteemed Elder Harriet Nahanee. Many Indigenous Elders, youth, women, and men were hurt and can identify with Harriet's experience as it encompasses the large extent of oppression we endure – criminalization for protecting our land from destruction, imprisonment, state injustice, racism, routine police and rcmp abuse, and violence, ostracization from our communities for speaking out, and illness and death as a result of colonial mistreatment and violence.

We do not represent or speak on Harriet Nahanee's behalf, that is her respected family's role. We will however honor the request she shared with us the day before she passed on to tell others that we must continue to fight for the land, for the red-footed frog, for the water and for our people.

Harriet's life, oppression, brave actions and experience opened a door and shed luminosity on a situation that many are blinded from. The Olympics, backed by government and big corporations will pursue their goals at any cost, even if it is an Elder's life. This is the painful reality. Harriet fought with all her heart and strength to bring oppression to an end in hopes that there will be something left for her grandchildren, in hopes that other's human rights will be respected amidst massive efforts of the rich and powerful to profit.

She gave us inspiration to continue the battle on the front lines for change, to wake people out of their slumber, out of their lives of justification of the system's oppression we all experience and into a strong spirit willing to sacrifice convenience and comfort, for justice, for freedom, for land and life.

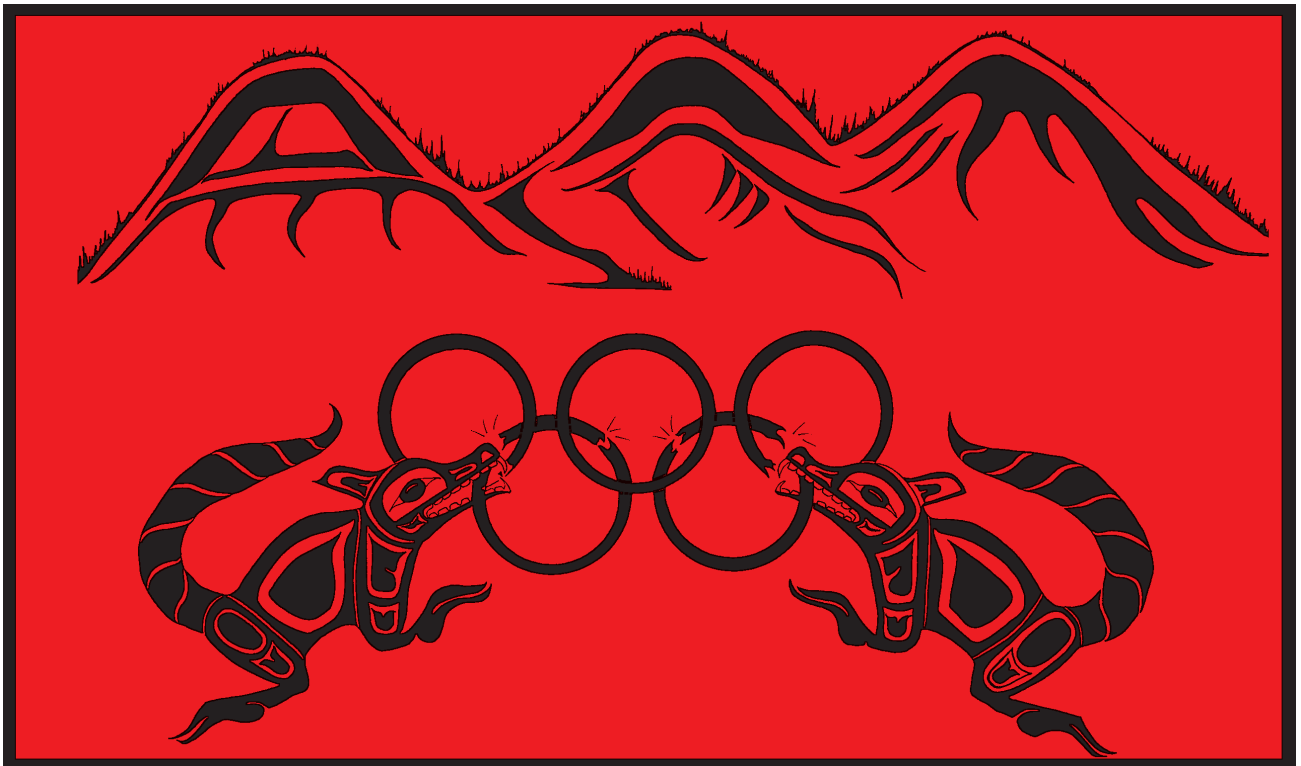
Another Skwxwu7mesh friend once told me, "it only takes one to make a difference". Geronimo repeated those words when he said: "if necessary I will fight alone"-(which he did with great success) (Geronimo 1881). It just takes one to send out an eminent message and lesson to influence mass change. Harriet's one spirit powerfully demonstrated that our fear of oppression can be overridden by direct responses to disrespect of our people and our lands. We cannot be afraid to stand up any longer.

Harriet, Hamy'ya (thank you) to you for your great work and vast impact you have had on Indigenous people in the struggle. Your voice will never be silenced.

– *The Strength & Struggle Indigenous Peoples' Free School*

If you are Indigenous and want to get involved in the decolonization and de-schooling movement take a class or take part in an action, email us at [indigenous.free.school@gmail.com](mailto:indigenous.free.school@gmail.com) We publish articles, rants, analysis, reviews and views too.

# NO 2010 OLYMPICS



# ON STOLEN NATIVE LAND!