



March 25, 2024

Public Statement re Ceremony

On March 22, 2024, the Chief and Council of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation were notified of an article that was published accusing Chief and Council of passing a resolution banning ceremony. This accusation is entirely false.

The article refers to Motion No. 979, mischaracterizing it as giving Chief and Council “the exclusive right to ban or approve a ceremony and to decide what is or isn’t considered a ceremony”.

Motion No. 979, passed on January 29, 2024, states the following:

We, the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, Band Council hereby authorize a moratorium on home cremations within the community until such time a referendum can be held.

The intention behind the motion was to call a moratorium on the act of home cremation on reserve until a referendum is held. The motion did not make any mention of what is or is not a ceremony, or grant Chief and Council any right to ban or approve a ceremony.

The article refers to a ‘letter’ that the author received from a concerned member. What she is referring to is a letter addressed to Mr. Kenneth Albert setting out Council’s reasoning for upholding an earlier decision expelling Mr. Albert from Neyaashiinigiing. That letter was provided to Mr. Albert after he had the opportunity to meet with Council.

The author quoted only portions of the letter, taking words out of context.

The following paragraphs are excerpts of the letter. The underlined portions were omitted from the publication, including the key fact that Council’s reference to the First Nation’s “inherent jurisdiction” or “inherent right” is about the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and its members’ inherent jurisdiction, as a Nation:

Nawash’s inherent jurisdiction also provides that it is up to the community to decide which activities constitute tradition or ceremony. On issues like this, where individuals may have differing views, Council may choose to hold a referendum with the community to determine what the community understands to be “ceremony”.

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On January 29, 2024, Council passed Motion No. 979 recognizing that the First Nation has an inherent right to decide what “ceremony” could take place on its territory. Council contemplated a referendum, knowing well that the diverse spiritual views in the community could give rise to debates surrounding what constitutes a “ceremony” within their tradition. Mr. Albert, on the other hand, did not seem to consider these differing views when he proceeded with the cremation.

We would like to emphasize that the fact that if a particular ceremony is accepted in another First Nation community does not necessarily mean it is accepted or part of the traditional ways of our First Nation. Nor does Canadian law define what is or is not a ceremony in our community. It is squarely within Nawash’s jurisdiction to decide what is or is not ceremony.

Mr. Albert, being a visitor in Neyaashiinigiing, was required to respect the laws and rules of our Nation. This involved not acting on his own accord. He was required to consult with Council and seek their permission, before proceeding with an activity that was foreign to the community. He was also required to respect the neighbours and community members who were impacted by his actions. He failed to do this.

Council leaves open the discussion as to what is a part of Nawash’s ceremony. It is up to our community members to decide, at a later date, without these events weighing on people’s minds.

We respect the ceremonies, traditions and spiritual beliefs held by all members of our community. As set out in the motion above, we hope to have an open discussion soon about the spirituality and traditionality of at-home cremation ceremonies in Neyaashiinigiing.

In the meantime, we ask community members to be patient and refrain from sharing misinformation that is being spread.