

Mr. Arni Thorsteinson
Chair, Board of Trustees
Canadian Museum of Human Rights
c/o 1560-201 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 3K6

June 5, 2009

Dear Mr. Thorsteinson,

Representatives of archaeological organizations and First Nations groups, as well as private citizens, met at the University of Manitoba on June 3, 2009. This letter is a result of that meeting.

Great concern was expressed at the disparity between the ideals expressed on the CMHR website and the reality of archaeological resource treatment. The time and money allocated to archaeological mitigation last year were insufficient, but the crux of concern at this point is the recent change in construction plans that calls for major intrusions into undisturbed soil that is well known to contain valuable heritage deposits from the pre-and post-European past. These intrusions will affect two areas that have not previously been mitigated and one area that was partially mitigated (in relation to new construction plans) last summer. The permit that has been issued to CMHR by the province's Historic Resources Branch makes requirements that are consistent with previous construction projects at the Forks, but we maintain that such requirements are minimal for two reasons. First, they are the same requirements that are made of, for example, road construction where a scatter of stone flakes might be found. Clearly, this is not equivalent to the richness and antiquity of the heritage deposits at the Forks. Second, the CMHR should espouse and demonstrate a standard that is above the minimum requirement for heritage preservation. The Canadian government has recently apologized for the incorrectness of its residential school system, which was designed to eradicate aboriginal culture. Unnecessary destruction of buried aboriginal culture is equally incorrect and must be avoided in order for the CMHR's stated ideals to be met. First Nations groups and the Canadian heritage community wish to see that there is substance behind apologies, and the maintenance of high standards of treatment for the heritage resources below the CMHR is therefore incumbent on the museum.

There is no opposition to the construction of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, and there is no opposition to its location. The concern is over adequate (more than minimal) treatment of buried cultural remains under the museum footprint. Sufficient time and money must be allocated to this work, otherwise the Museum risks violating its own stated objectives.

There was a clear sentiment among the archaeological and First Nations attendees that support in meeting these higher standards should be offered. There are a number of forms that this support could possibly take, e.g. volunteer excavation crew, supervision of a public archaeology program, analytic technology and expertise, traditional knowledge, laboratory and storage space, a field school (summer), display and dissemination support,

oral history. To the extent that the Museum adopts standards above the minimum required by permit in treating the buried archaeological heritage, support of the kinds just noted could be expected.

You will no doubt be aware of Article 11.1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that they have "... the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature." The CMHR, as a national institution, should enshrine these rights in practice, and it should expect tangible support in doing so from those concerned with its construction.

If I can supply you with further information or discussion, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of those in attendance at Wednesday's meeting, I remain,

Sincerely

Gregory G. Monks, Ph.D.
Professor of Anthropology
University of Manitoba
474-6332 (ph)
474-7600 (fax)
<monks@cc.umanitoba.ca>