

# Open Letter from the Williams Family Regarding their Rights and Safety

By the Williams Family

*As the land back movement at 1492 Land Back Lane goes on, so do the threats and intimidations faced by Indigenous Peoples.*

*Skyler Williams, spokesperson for 1492 Land Back Lane and his wife, Kahsenniyo, are Haudenosaunee Land Defenders from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, near Caledonia, Ontario. They have both been arrested recently for allegedly defying a court injunction to remove the Haudenosaunee from the camp. Their arrests were praised online by Ken Hewitt, the mayor of Haldimand County (which includes Caledonia). Mayor Ken Hewitt encouraged police to detain them indefinitely - a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms - and to proceed to arrest "other family members" of Skyler Williams.*

*This open letter from the Williams family was written at the request of three of their teenage daughters to address the intimidation directed at their family by Ken Hewitt but also the Haldimand Police Services Board, and the Ontario Provincial Police.*

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About a hundred years ago, in 1927, when First Nation peoples were increasingly organizing land claims, the federal government amended the *Indian Act* to make it illegal for anyone to fundraise for First Nation peoples' legal representation. It also made it illegal for any litigator to represent any First Nation person in a judicial proceeding. The penalty for such activity was a fine and/or imprisonment.

As Haudenosaunee people continue to fight the colonial theft of land along the Grand River, the government still criminalizes our resistance.

Today, it is legal under Canadian law for us to hire lawyers and make land claims. But now, court injunctions allow those who desire our land to legally swoop in and take it while we are forced to navigate costly and lengthy court proceedings. This is hardly progress. When Haudenosaunee Land Defenders and our allies are required to defy injunctions to protect our territories, we are arrested, charged, and threatened with incarceration. It is still a crime to fight for our lands, but we are still fighting.

## **Land defense criminalization is meant to divide families, nations, and allies, in order to scare us into submission.**

Knowing this, Caledonia mayor Ken Hewitt has publicly applauded the police for "taking a stand" in arresting and charging our family for participating in the 1492 land defense. Hewitt said he looked forward to more arrests of our family members, and suggested the courts keep us in jail.

This is especially alarming as these comments from Ken Hewitt come several weeks following the [Haldimand Police Service Boards comments and recommendation](#) that the OPP re-evaluate their “Indigenous Critical Incidents Policy” – crafted to ensure that there are not Indigenous fatalities during land disputes. Ken Hewitt made no condemnation of these very concerning comments from his Police Service Board.

Our children hear these words and rightly fear for our safety, and their own. They want the residents of Caledonia and the people of Canada to reflect on the impacts of land defense criminalization on Indigenous families. As the inheritors of all our collective actions, our children – Nora, Lola, and Makiyah – are speaking about what they see, and we are listening. The real attack against our family is the ongoing assault on Haudenosaunee lands, culture, and community, and politicians’ personal attacks remind us to seek strength in our collective struggle for peace.

**- KAHENNIYO AND SKYLER WILLIAMS**

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**NORA WILLIAMS, 18**

My name is Nora Williams, Kahsenniyo and Skyler are my parents. I’d like to address the recent comments made by Haldimand County mayor Ken Hewitt, specifically that he “will continue to support the OPP in their efforts and applaud them for taking the stand such as arresting family members of Skyler Williams.” I do not appreciate being attacked in such a manner.

**To try and convince police forces to focus on the partner, elders and teenage children of a land defence spokesperson is cowardly.**

Whether you’re simply trying to force my father’s hand, or if you’ve simply decided to ignore basic human rights, either are beyond my understanding. If you’re so desperate for us to behave as “Canadians” and not care about our land and traditions, what is your own moral code as a Canadian government official?

Instead of trying to understand, you chose force. Instead of reason, you chose underhanded and violent tactics. Instead of basic rights, you chose to try to expand what power you have in a shameful attempt to sway OPP officials to target the elderly and children. Instead of questioning our right to land, question your own right to land. These kinds of attacks will not change my opinions and actions to defend my land and my traditions.

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**LOLA WILLIAMS, 14**

My name is Lola Williams – Skyler Williams is my Dad. He has been a land defender for as long as I can remember. Me and my Dad have always been very close. Our entire family has always been very close.

**I am proud of both of my parents. But right now, after reading the Haldimand Police Services Board recommendations, and then the mayor Ken Hewitt applauding the OPP for arresting my Mom, and encouraging them to go after others in my family, I’m scared. I’m scared of what this means for my grandparents, my sisters and me.**

I go to school in Caledonia. The OPP have set up right across the road from my school. These are the people that shot at my Dad and arrested my Mom when she was alone. Now I have to see them every time I look out the window or go to lunch. Every time I walk out the front doors of the school, I see all these white men with guns who are being encouraged to target me and my family. I am so disappointed that the Mayor of the County that I go to school in would choose to make such hateful and dangerous comments to target teenage girls and my elderly grandparents.

## **MAKIYAH WILLIAMS, 16**

My name is Makiyah, I am the daughter of Skyler and Kahsenniyo. I am writing this letter because I would like to address the comments made by Haldimand County mayor Ken Hewitt. These comments are wrong and racist. I am an Indigenous youth from Six Nations. Seeing these racist and awful comments was troubling and sickening.

How is Caledonia supposed to be represented by someone who openly targeted my parents, and applauded the OPP for arresting my Mom? Hewitt is putting our family in danger, without understanding the impacts it has on my parents, grandparents, sisters, and on the generations to come. Tell me how this is okay.

Being a student in Caledonia means I am at risk for being targeted and threatened. Any threat to my family threatens me and my sisters.

**It is heartbreaking and saddening to see politicians cheer when my Mom was arrested for tending to her Haudenosaunee responsibilities as a Mohawk woman.**

**Imagine this was your family being targeted: how would you feel?**

It's so hard to consistently worry about what will happen next, to worry for my sisters' safety. Our people know how this feels, and our responsibilities will always guide our actions, even when we are afraid.

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*Support Haudenosaunee Land Defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane on [social media](#), [GoFundMe](#), or by e-transfer to [landback6nations@gmail.com](mailto:landback6nations@gmail.com). A permanent injunction is currently in place over this disputed parcel of land. Haudenosaunee who continue to fight for their lands will continue to face police violence and criminalization in the weeks and months ahead.*