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PRESS RELEASE

Initiatives of Change Australia hosts First Nations Canadian team seek to open dialogue with First Nations Australians

Many large, powerful nation states have begun to recognise the voices of their First Peoples within their borders. At a time when the world's population is facing a great risk to its very survival, Lewis Cardinal, a Woodland Cree communicator from northern Alberta, says 'the world needs the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples more than ever so that we learn how to live differently, together, under the lead of the Great Creator Spirit. We have to live in harmony with all that is.'

Cardinal, who is convening a Global Indigenous Dialogue in IofC Caux Switzerland this July, will be visiting Australia from 19-28 February, along with Chief Lee Crowchild, a respected Tsuut'ina environmentalist and ceremonialist. They seek to join and learn from the national conversation with Australian First Nations people, at a time when the shape and content of Voice and Treaty are being debated.

Their program in Australia is being organised by Initiatives of Change Australia (IofC-A), based in Melbourne, and part of a movement in 44 countries seeking to 'build trust across the world's divides'.



IofC-A has committed to 'trust-building through truth-telling and deep listening' in response to the Statement from the Heart, and its agenda of 'Voice, Treaty, Truth.'

Both men had great-grandfathers who signed treaties on behalf of their tribes – treaties which, in 1968-1970, the Canadian government under Pierre Trudeau (father of the current Prime Minister) sought to abolish.

Their fathers were at the core of a national movement for treaty rights and have lived their lives in that struggle. In 1982 the 11 treaties were integrated into the Canadian Constitution ensuring that their First Nations become 'partners in Confederation on the basis of a fair and just reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Crown'.

Cardinal sees 'the good and bad sides' of treaties. 'They have brought strength to Canada, but also have taken us back to relationship. We can learn from each other. It is not an easy process: one side doesn't understand the spiritual relationship side of treaty – it's not just political/ economic.'

It means recognition that we are Spirit people with deep connection to the land, to great mystery, to the Creator... If you don't have the aspect of relationship, the debate becomes a political football very quickly.'

Their visit starts at Melbourne's Capitol Theatre, 11:00am on Sunday 19 February.

As part of this year's National Sustainable Living Festival, they and their Australian counterparts will address 'First Nations Wisdom for Regenerative Futures', drawing particularly on Lewis Cardinal's experience as project manager for Canada's first urban Indigenous ceremonial grounds in the city of Edmonton. The group will also have a conversation with members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.

In rural NSW, they will meet Wiradjuri elders and visit Tirkandi Inaburra, an Aboriginal-run program dedicated to strengthening the cultural identity, self-esteem and resilience of young Aboriginals.

In Sydney they are scheduled to interact with politicians, Indigenous academics and community activists.

Finally they fly to East Arnhemland, to gain an insight into traditional communities and proponents of Indigenous languages and self-determination.

Others in the Canadian party are:

- Rainbow Cardinal, a poet and healer of the Sucker Creek Cree First Nation;
- Samantha Myers, a photographer, mental health advocate and domestic violence survivor who will make a video of the visit; and
- Dr Ian MacNairn, a physician and anthropologist, who has worked closely with them on traditional knowledge and land use contributing to regulatory processes.

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