

Land Acknowledgement and context presented at the Opening Ceremony of daCi *Dancing into Communities* Canada Virtual Conference 2022

Before we communicate our land acknowledgements, we want to provide you with some historical background and explanation of why this protocol is so important. In Canada, we work and live on land that belonged to the original habitants of this land, now known as Canada, for millennia before being taken over by French and then English settlers. In an effort to help restore justice to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was established in August 1991. The central conclusion of the report, submitted in October 1996 was clear: *The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, was wrong.* How was it wrong? Over several centuries, successive governments tried to absorb Indigenous people into Canadian society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples. The policies that were pursued undermined, and almost erased, the cultures and identities of Indigenous peoples of this land now known as Canada. These assimilation policies failed, because Indigenous people have an enduring sense of themselves as peoples with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity. This sense of themselves has given them the strength to blockade roads, to protest at contentious sites and to fight efforts to occupy sacred grounds. Settler Canadians need to understand that *Indigenous peoples are nations*. That is, they are political and cultural groups with values and life ways distinct from those of other Canadians.

Land acknowledgements are one way through which to provide education on the relationship of settler Canadians to the Indigenous nations on whose lands we work and reside. The goal is to repair the historical damage to the relationship and to enter an era of mutual recognition and respect, sharing and responsibility. Treaties made with Indigenous nations were entered into at sacred ceremonies and were intended to be enduring. The central feature of almost all the treaties was to provide for the orderly and peaceful sharing of a land and the establishment of relations of peace and even kinship. In the treaties, Indigenous people, who believe that the Creator set them on their traditional territories and gave them the responsibility of stewardship of the land and of everything on it, did not surrender that land knowingly and willingly to strangers but, consistent with their world view and ethical norms, they agreed to share the land with newcomers. A just and fair fulfilment of the treaties is fundamental to preserving Canada's honour in the eyes of the world as well as in the eyes of Canadians themselves.