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PRESS RELEASE

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"Mohawk Mothers Return to Court Thursday As McGill and SQI Drill Holes At Royal Victoria Hospital"

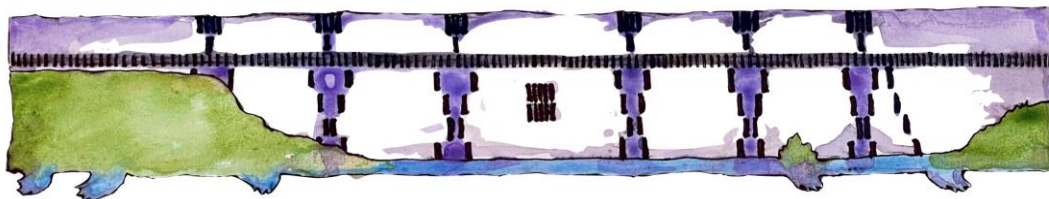
Tio'tià:ke (Montreal) – The Mohawk Mothers, also known as the Kahnistensera, will hold a press conference at the corner of avenue des Pins and Doctor Penfield on September 12, 2023, at 2:30pm.

The Kahnistensera filed an Emergency Motion to halt drilling and excavation at the Royal Victoria Hospital site, which will be heard on Thursday September 14 at the Superior Court in Montreal. The Emergency Motion details breaches to the Settlement Agreement by McGill and the SQI that the Mohawk Mothers repeatedly raised in direct talks about significant concerns with the way they are handling the archaeological investigation ordered by the Quebec Superior Court to search for unmarked graves of victims of medical experiments.

The Kahnistensera are shocked and disappointed that McGill University and the Société Québécoise des infrastructures (SQI) have pressed ahead with construction on September 11, 2023 by drilling a large number of holes marking the beginning of a series of excavations.

The same day, McGill University issued a message to all its staff and students, declaring that the investigation of the zone where they want to start work is complete, and produced no evidence of graves. The Mohawk Mothers see these developments as major provocations, as the investigation is far from complete and McGill's messaging predominantly emphasizes favourable findings while concurrently concealing or downplaying several discoveries that confirm the possibility of unmarked burials at the New Vic site. These discoveries require further follow-up to determine whether the New Vic development work can safely proceed.

On August 29, 2023, the Mohawk Mothers filed a motion for a safeguard order to enforce the settlement agreement signed by all parties in April 2023, after a landmark injunction stopping work in October 2023. The Kahnistensera flagged several breaches to the letter and the spirit of the settlement agreement, after McGill and SQI disbanded the panel of three archaeologist experts agreed upon by all parties to make recommendations.



The Kahnistensera's court files show that McGill and the SQI refused to follow several recommendations from the archaeologists, such as sifting the soil of areas where anomalies of potential bodies were located. Court documents also reveal that the SQI refused to share data from Ground Penetrating Radar with the Canadian Archaeology Association and the panel of experts itself, and silenced numerous "unknown" anomalies that the GPR report say could possibly be graves of children or without coffins in public communications. Several artifacts, including a dress, children's shoes and bones excavated in a zone where search dogs detected the scent of human remains have not yet been examined by experts, and the origin of the scent of human remains picked up by search dogs has not been established.

According to the Kahnistensera, SQI and McGill have refused to allow the search dogs to return to the site to sniff the piles of soil that were excavated or determine whether the smell came from inside the building, where archaeologists were denied access.

"Since the Panel was disbanded, McGill and SQI have basically decided to take over the whole investigation, even though they have been opposed to it even happening from the start," said Kwetiio, a Mohawk Mother. "I don't understand how it is even possible that they can act that way when a Court Order determined that this would be a Indigenous-led", she said, "And there was just a little extra effort to do this the right way and provide closure to survivors and the families. We had gone such a long way with everything that happened."

During three weeks the work had stopped after the Mohawk Mothers and Cultural Monitors were attacked by security guards working for the SQI on July 25th. The guards had assaulted someone present to take his phone to erase a video, while someone else recorded racist insults telling the Mohawk elders to "go make some children" and "find a life."

According to Kahentinetha, "on September 11 we saw the two same security guards on the archaeological site, even though the SQI told us they had been removed". Even though the settlement agreement allowed Indigenous cultural monitors to be on the site and monitor the work, Kahentinetha, 84 years old, says they now fear for their safety. "The security guards that attacked us are still there, and now they want to rush in large-scale excavation for their New Vic project. In fact they drilled those holes yesterday without us being present. They didn't even give us a safety training for working in zones under construction with heavy machinery, and we don't have the proper equipment. The settlement agreement said we have to be there, but it's extremely dangerous in these conditions." The Kahnistensera also indicated that violations of construction safety regulations were already flagged, as masonry material stacked higher than 1.8 meters next to an unsanitary toilet cultural monitors were expected to use. "Are we still being treated like animals, like a problem to get rid of, in the heart of Montreal, where the village of our ancestors sits," said Kahentinetha. "But we will not take genocide anymore, both Canadian and Mohawk law agree on this," she said.



The Kanien'kehá:ka Kahnistensera (Mohawk Mothers) is a Kahnawake-based group that helps Indigenous women accomplish their traditional cultural duty as caretakers of the land, to protect all life, including their children and ancestors. They have been engaged in a legal challenge with promoters of the New Vic project to stall future excavation of the former Royal Victoria Hospital site until a proper archaeological investigation is conducted, using the traditional protocols of the Kaianere'kó:wa (Great Peace).

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