

Expulsion of Native elder from Edmonton Mall sparks outrage

By Tim Reynolds

TREATY SIX – On October 27 Gary Moostoos, also known as Red Rock and Four-Legged Human, from the Sturgeon Lake Woodland Cree nation in Alberta, captured national media attention when he was unjustly banned from the City Centre Mall in Edmonton for six months. Gary Moostoos spoke with the *Two Row Times* about his ordeal.

“About a year before this happened, I was involved in another incident at the very same mall in the food court,” says Moostoos. “I placed an order at the KFC, then another man placed the same order after me and received it first. Then another man, who was white, ordered the same meal and he also got his order before me, so I asked, ‘What’s going on here with my order?’ The second customer who got

the order before me started swearing at me and being insulting. I was calm about it and asked, ‘Why swear at me?’ He asked for the Mall security to come, but it took a while for them to show up and the man was gone by then. Security found the man eating with his kids in the food court. The man falsely accused me of scaring his kids. His children were not in the restaurant when it happened and I suggested that the security cameras would show that I was telling the truth. It became clear that security wasn’t going to do anything about it and the man was laughing at me. I didn’t react because I knew it wouldn’t get me anywhere.”

Moostoos regularly went to the mall to meet up with homeless clients since he is an outreach worker. On October 27, 2014 - about a year after the KFC incident - another

incident occurred.

“Two security guards approached me and asked for my name, stating that I looked suspicious. Witnesses said that 8-10 security guards came eventually to escort me out. If I would have reacted that day in the way they wanted me to, they would have taken me down and handcuffed me,” says Moostoos. “[That] would have been embarrassing, like it has been for other Aboriginal people at that mall. I accepted the ban to not give them that reaction they wanted.”

Since then, the ban has caught national media attention, even getting discussed in Ottawa in parliament by Linda Duncan, the NDP MP for Edmonton-Strathcona. Duncan stated in Parliament that Moostoos was subjected to public humiliation and is emotionally wounded as a result.

The mall has offered an apology, but there are still unanswered questions. Was this elder targeted because he looked Aboriginal? What direction was security given? Is the intention to keep the homeless and traumatized out on the street and out of the mall?

On November 8, 2014, a ceremony and a public apology happened at City Centre Mall, which is owned by Oxford properties. Those in support of Gary Moostoos reminded Oxford properties that it hasn’t done due diligence to consult the indigenous people of Treaty 6 with running the mall business on their territory. They

also pointed out that Oxford properties had no jurisdiction to ban anyone on that property and demanded an end to racial profiling.

City Centre General Manager Olympia Trencovski apologized to Mr. Moostoos, saying, “I want to look into yours eyes and I want to tell you from my heart to yours that I sincerely apologize for hurting your feelings and I’m sorry for what happened to you. It was unacceptable, it was a mistake, I am sorry. I also want to say sorry to the community at large and the feeling, the pain that you felt.”

Moostoos was hesitant in his response, say-

ing, “I appreciate the apology but there is a lot of work to be done. I cannot at this time say that I accept the apology - I appreciate the apology.”

When asked why he didn’t accept the apology, Moostoos stated, “I lived a life of broken promises and broken words. In my tradition, if you create trust and respect first, then there’s an apology. When we gain trust and gain respect back, then we apologize. They sent a representative of the company, not the security guards, to apologize. A 5-year-old could have apologized in that case, so it’s not correct. We need to stop reacting and start acting.”