…I’d like to begin by recognizing and acknowledging whose traditional territory we stand on today. A cornerstone of social justice is the recognition of one’s humanity, personhood, culture, heritage, in fact one’s very existence.

Unfortunately for hundreds upon hundreds of years governments and authorities of power have not only denied indigenous existence through policies of terra nullus but continued forward on paths of cultural genocide and forced assimilation.

It is heartening however that as time moves forward, so to do attitudes. Therefore I want to recognize that we are all visitors to this land and that we stand on unceded aboriginal territory.

We are in fact on the traditional territories of the Secwepemc (She-whep-m) in English sometimes referred to as the Sushwap. The She-whep-m are the indigenous Peoples who inhabit the south central interior of British Columbia. Their vast territory of approximately 180,000 square km extends from the Columbia River Valley on the east slope of the Rocky Mountains to the Fraser River on the west and from the upper Fraser River in the north to the Arrow Lakes in the south. Let us all raise our hands in honor and respect to the She-whep-m people for allowing us on their traditional territory and for letting us have our annual Summer Conference on their storied lands.

 I want to end this recognition on this note. Instead of an us vs them mentality where some may feel that this is an “Add-on” or perhaps even an act of tokenism that in fact it is the opposite. We are in fact not only all visitors to this land but also treaty people. Think for a moment of your heritage and background. We all exist within top-down man-made borders.

For many of us,we have had to escape persecution, and oppression. Whether it be the 1947 Partition of India, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, The Northern Ireland Troubles or any number of depressed socio-economic realities, we all in our backgrounds have faced the notion of being subhuman and therefore not recognized.

What this means is that we truly are in this together, and by recognizing aboriginal territory and existence from time immemorial we do in fact recognize our own humanity, and our own heritage.

It strengthens the fabric of who we are as humans and provides us with a stronger base from which to fight for social justice.

And so we recognize the lands on which we visit, we thank them and we fight alongside them as brothers and sisters of a common family…the human one.