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Friends United trio attend invite-only meeting with Chinese ambassador

By **Drake Lowthers** · December 22, 2022



Rolf Bouman (middle) is pictured with former premiers Stephen McNeil (left) and Rodney MacDonald. On Nov. 24, Bouman met with the Chinese ambassador to discuss educational and cultural exchanges.

HALIFAX: The founder of Friends United says there was some really good dialogue with the Chinese ambassador during a small, invite-only meeting.

Late last month, Friends United Board of Directors member and Hereditary Chief and Keptin on the Mi'kmaq Grand Council Stephen Augustine, Friends United Initiative Founder Rolf Bouman, and Adam Rodgers, Friends United strategic advisor, were among a small group invited to a luncheon with the Chinese Ambassador to Canada, Cong Peiwu, and his

delegation.

The Nov. 24 meeting, which only had 12 people in attendance that included five from the Chinese delegation, stemmed from a previous meeting at the Friends United International Convention Centre in Richmond County six months ago, with Edward Dai of the Chinese-Canadian Business Council.

“Edward said they would like to place a lot of original Indigenous artwork in China, which made a lot of sense to us,” Bouman told *The Reporter* in an interview. “Then when we met with the ambassador, he picked up on that too and we discussed a proposed cultural exchange in which First Nations artwork would be displayed in prominent Chinese museums and galleries.”

As it’s one of the goals of the Friends United Initiative to give Indigenous artists of North America more global exposure and recognition, it was agreed to entertain more dialogue as to how Chinese citizens can access artwork from Friends United artists.

According to Bouman, the Chinese ambassador pointed out that China has a culture and history, which is more than 4,000-years-old and naturally there is a large interest in other millennia-old cultures, including the Indigenous cultures of North America.

Over the 90-minute meeting, Rodgers indicated many issues of China-Canada cultural and economic relations were discussed, and while there was also representation from Cape Breton University, Clearwater Seafood and the Port of Halifax, he suggested a lot of the conversation centered around educational and cultural exchanges.

“It was really interesting that that’s what the Chinese ambassador wanted to talk about. I thought that was significant in itself,” Rodgers told *The Reporter*. “One of the points he made was to maintain good conversation, personal dialogue and a cultural dialogue, rather than having disputes through the media and these misunderstandings that can come with international relations at that level.”

As to why this was such an important meeting for them at Friends United, their founder suggested it was quite simple.

“It’s about a culture that’s 4,000-years-old in China, just like the Indigenous culture here,