

MEDIA RELEASE DATED 25 MAY 2006

Despite being ranked highly on the U.N. Human Development Index, Canada has a poor international reputation in terms of its treatment of Aboriginal people. The United Nations Human Rights Commission in 1999 found Canada in breach of its obligations to Indigenous people under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and urged that 'decisive and urgent action be taken toward the full implementation' of the recommendations on land and resource allocation of Canada's own Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The 2004 Report on his Mission to Canada by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous people made a similar case and provided 25 specific recommendations, including on the issues of land and resources and protection of human rights.

The conflict surrounding the Henco development at Douglas Creek is an example of a case where legitimate historical land claims have not been adequately addressed.

The Haldimand Proclamation of October 25, 1784 granted to the Six Nations Confederacy six miles of land on each side of the Grand River, from its headwaters to the mouth on Lake Erie. That legacy has shrunk to a small percentage of its original size in the intervening period. Six Nations lands today comprise less than 4.8% of that which was promised in the Haldimand Deed of 1784 (reduced from approximately 950,000 acres to approximately 45,000 acres today). The Six Nations Confederacy has actively sought over a long period, and with little success, to recover its lands. Since 1974, 29 claims have been filed by Six Nations, only one of which has been fully resolved, in 1980. The Hamilton-Port Dover Plank Road claim, which includes Douglas Creek, was filed in June 1987, long before the current conflict. More recently, with regard to the Henco development at Douglas Creek, several months before the blockade first started Six Nations people and supporters organized a public information session at Douglas Creek to draw attention to the fact that the development was taking place on land over which Six Nations claimed ownership.

Writing in the context of colonial Africa as late as the early 1930s, the French Minister of the Colonies, Albert Sarraut, asked rhetorically: "Should we out of the dictates of an ideal law leave in the hands of the natives resources which would in our hands lead to our prosperity and theirs? The answer is obvious." In reality, in such situations, the prosperity arising from the negation of native ownership of land and resources has not been shared. Issues of land ownership are rife wherever the native and settler populations continue to co-exist today. Given the importance of land to a people striving for its cultural, spiritual and economic existence, given the differing concepts of property ownership at issue, and given the unequal power relationship between indigenous people and dominant Canadian society, it is not surprising that this conflict over land ownership has arisen. The opening up of areas of north Haldimand and Brant counties surrounding Six Nations to development and the destruction of farmland resulting from recent provincial land use policy has contributed to creating conditions of conflict.

We hope that civic leaders will speak out against any occurrence of bigotry, especially given the long period of peaceful cohabitation between Six Nations and Caledonia residents. While the root causes of the conflict must be addressed, we applaud the recent demonstrations of good will and good sense by those in the Caledonia community who have joined those in the Six Nations

to de-escalate the confrontation. We also applaud the federal and provincial governments for agreeing to negotiate with the Confederacy Chiefs and Clan Mothers, the form of government outlined in the Great Law of Peace and in place with the Haudenosaunee people since before contact with European colonizers. This Confederacy was brutally repressed by the federal government when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police invaded Six Nations territory in 1924. We urge that this good will be nourished and supported by everyone in Canada concerned for justice, and we make the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the current moratorium on the disputed Douglas Creek lands be maintained until such a time as a just resolution emerges;
- That the Federal Government move swiftly to facilitate a just settlement of all other pending land claims and that it make recognition of the Confederacy government a permanent change;
- That the recommendations of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples receive priority attention by the Federal Government both as a matter of justice and human rights and to prevent the rise of further such confrontations, which are symptoms of a deep malaise in the relationship between the dominant society and the aboriginal peoples of this land;
- That the media be urged to probe the deeper causes and historical context of the Caledonia confrontation beyond the immediate incidents and to expand public understanding on this issue;
- That educational institutions ensure that school curricula enable students to get a better understanding of issues affecting First Nations peoples in their relationship with Canadian society;
- That all levels of government work to maintain a climate of respectful dialogue with a view to finding lasting solutions to the above issues.

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