

Statement by Observer Delegation of Canada
to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Delivered by Ross Hynes, August 1, 1990

Madam, Chairman, with your kind indulgence, I am taking the floor to say a brief word about a matter that has been mentioned by a number of speakers. I am referring to the situation in Oka-Kanesatake.

Over the last couple of days, different information and views about the situation in Oka-Kanesatake have been brought to your attention from various sources: Canadian and other interested indigenous representatives, representatives of international NGOs, and preliminary reports emanating from Canadian institutions established to ensure the protection of human rights in our country. This is of course a reflection of the openness of Canadian society and of the effectiveness of the various institutions established in Canada to ensure the protection of the human rights of all Canadian citizens.

It is not our usual practice to intervene separately on specific issues that are raised in this Working Group. We appreciate that this is not a court of inquiry. As you have underlined many times in the past, this is not your mandate, and we are confident that no member of the Working Group would seek to transform your proceedings in such a direction.

As we said last week when this question was first raised, the situation in Oka is an extremely delicate and dangerous one in which Quebec provincial law enforcement officers are coping with the efforts of a small group of people to assert their demands by resort to illegal arms. This has already led to the death of one policeman.

The Canadian government's responsibility in such a situation is above all to contribute in every way possible to ensuring that the confrontation is defused in a peaceful way involving no further harm to anyone involved. So we are not going to say anything that risks in any way jeopardizing those efforts. We are not going to engage in extemporaneous exchanges on such a sensitive matter with any participants in this meeting; and I am sure you and the other members of the Working Group will agree that it would be reckless and irresponsible to seek to encourage such debate.

Against that background and within those parameters, we have however concluded that it would be useful for us to provide an update on a couple of points which are the object of apparent misunderstanding on the part of some participants.

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On Monday Ambassador Shannon reviewed the genesis of the dispute at Oka and outlined recent developments up until that date, including some key elements of the Quebec government's seven point proposal to reduce tensions in Oka-Kanesatake. One element of that proposal was the creation of a seven-person supervisory commission, jointly appointed by Quebec and the Mohawks of Kanesatake to exercise its mandate before, during and after the withdrawal of the barricades. One significant development since Monday has been the acceptance by Quebec that Mr. Fouque of the Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme be a member of that group. You will recall that yesterday Mr Deer identified the Federation as a worthy international NGO, and we have today heard the representative of the Federation indicate their readiness to accept the invitation. Needless to say, Madam Chairman, the Government of Canada, having endorsed Quebec's seven point proposal, welcomes this development - as was made clear in a public statement yesterday in Canada by the Minister of State for Indian affairs, the Honourable Shirley Martin.

Regarding the federal governments actions to consolidate land holdings at Oka-Kanesatake, I would like to inform you that an agreement was reached with negotiators for the town of Oka to acquire the land that had been slated for expansion of the local golf course for a total of \$3.8 million... At a community meeting last night Mayor Ouellette recommended acceptance of the package to town council and citizens, and the community indicated its readiness to finalize the agreement after the Mohawk barricades come down.

Madam Chairman, it is the Canadian Government's hope that these developments will contribute further to permitting a return to normalcy in Oka-Kanesatake..