



Natives and non natives unite to protect lands and livelihoods

Historic rally at Queen's Park today calls for antiquated laws to be changed and respect for First Nation rights

For immediate Release

May 26, 2008

Toronto- Three First Nations will be calling on the province today to respect their right to say NO to mineral exploration and logging on their lands at a rally at Queen's Park. The rally, scheduled to begin at 5pm with a press conference at 4:30pm, is an event of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI), Ardoch Algonquins and Grassy Narrows. It is supported by over 25 environmental, social justice, student, faith, and union groups from across the province and Canada.

Masters of Ceremony will be Thomas King, celebrated author and Cathy Jones, actor, writer and comedian from CBC Television's *This Hour has 22 Minutes*. Signifying the importance of the issue to Aboriginal rights and sovereignty, former National Chief Ovide Mercredi of the Assembly of First Nations will address the rally. A letter from Mr. Robert Kennedy Jr. to Premier McGuinty will also be read at the rally. In the letter, Mr. Kennedy asks that the Premier reform Ontario's outdated mining rules and do whatever possible to halt ongoing drilling on traditional lands of jailed First Nations' leaders.

"We never surrendered our traditional lands and we never agreed to be bound by the reserve. We will never give up our duty to protect our traditional lands that we use for hunting and fishing," said KI Counsellor Sam MacKay from jail in Thunder Bay. He and five others known as the KI Six are being detained after being found in contempt of court for peacefully opposing mineral exploration on their traditional lands 600km north of Thunder Bay in the Boreal Forest.

For too long, the provincial government has ignored First Nation communities when they refuse industrial development on their lands. The province then permits industry to run roughshod over them. Recently landowners in eastern Ontario have also suffered a similar fate because of antiquated mining laws. This all has to change demand the First Nations, landowners and their supporters.

"I think that things like the protection of the environment bring people together. I think that we all have an innate sort of indigenous belief that we have responsibilities to the Earth, whether we're aboriginal or not," recently commented Robert Lovelace, University Professor and retired Chief of the Ardoch Algonquins from jail in an interview with *Indian Country Times*. Mr. Lovelace is serving a six month sentence for peacefully opposing uranium exploration in eastern Ontario.

Chrissy Swain, of Grassy Narrows, is arriving at the rally after walking 1700 km from Kenora to Toronto with a group of young people to raise awareness of the ongoing logging that's going in her community's traditional territory. Ms. Swain will be addressing the rally tonight. "The way I see things and the way (Grassy Narrows youth) see things, we have to look way ahead into the future," Ms. Swain said. "That's how serious this is. What we decide today is going to impact what happens to my great-grandchildren. Any decisions made on my behalf also affect my great-grandchildren."

A press conference is scheduled for 4:30pm on the south lawn at Queen's Park before the rally starts at 5pm.

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For more information or to pre-arrange interviews, please contact

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Co-sponsors of the rally:

The Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples
CAIA
Canadian Federation of Students
Canadian Labour Congress
Christian Peacemaker Teams
CAW Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy – Ryerson University
CEP
CPAWS Wildlands League
CUPE National
CUPE Ontario
Defence for Children International
ForestEthics
Greenpeace
KAIROS
MiningWatch Canada
No One is Illegal Toronto
NOW Magazine
OCAP
Ontario Environmental Justice Organizing Initiative,
OPSEU
OPSEU 596
OSSTF
Rainforest Action Network
Ryerson Aboriginal Students Services
Steelworkers Humanity Fund
University of Winnipeg Students' Association

This is the broadest and most active coalition I have seen since the anti-free trade fight in the late 1980's.

-Judy Rebick