

Elected Councils unite against C-10

By Jim Windle

SIX NATIONS - The Iroquois Caucus has come out swinging against the Harper Government's "Contraband Tobacco Act," otherwise known as Bill C-10.

The Caucus, which represents elected band council leaders from Akwesasne, Kahnestatake, Kahnawà:ke, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Six Nations of the Grand River, Tyendinaga and Wahta, released a resolution statement and media release Wednesday March 12th showing their united disdain for, and rejection of, the Bill, which directly interferes with the economy of all Iroquois member Nations.

In the strongly worded resolution, the Caucus rejects the Bill in its entirety, including all of its components and content.

It goes on to demand that Canada immediately cease any further development, passage or implementation of the controversial, and unilaterally conceived Act, calling it, "legislation that may affect economics and trade in Iroquois territories including our right to govern, regulate, sell, manufacture and trade in tobacco and tobacco related products."

The Iroquois Caucus pledges to take "all actions necessary" to rally other First Nations outside of the Caucus' jurisdiction to form a united

front against the Bill.

"The Iroquois Caucus recognizes that Bill C-10 was developed and is being implemented without consultation and accommodation with First Nations, as required by the Duty to Consult and Accommodate, and the Honour of the Crown," according to the resolution.

But along with the strong warning, the release also leaves the door open for Harper to begin meaningful consultation and accommodation before implementing this unilateral Bill, saying that the Caucus remains open to discuss these issues in order to find "mutually acceptable solutions to ensuring our respective systems co-exist in peace and harmony."

The resolution was initially proposed by Chief Joel Abram, of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, and seconded by Six Nations' Elected Chief Ava Hill, who has been an outspoken opponent to the Bill.

"We had representatives from the industry make presentations, and it was discussed that we should create our own tobacco law for ourselves," said Hill.

It outlines 18 specific reasons why the Bill and its unilateral and heavy handed attack on Iroquois people's right to self-determination and economic development by the majority Conservative government is both offensive and illegal

according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the Canadian Constitution itself.

It also provides a historical accounting of the place tobacco has had and continues to have amongst Onkwehon:we people in general but Iroquois people specifically, as both a trade item and for its cultural and ceremonial significance.

"We need to be standing together on this," says Hill. "I don't know what its going to take to get them to understand that. We are holding a community meeting March 26th, at 7 pm, at Six Nations Polytech and it would be very good if some of the Confederacy Chiefs attended that meeting."

Joel Abram, Chief of the Oneida Nation, says: "Although we haven't yet had the chance to confer and agree on what actions we may take, I'm not ruling anything out yet including direct action and/or legal actions to defend our rights. We estimate that for Oneida up to 20% of the population is involved in a direct way with the tobacco business, and the economic ramifications go much deeper than that because the money cycles around the community through stores, restaurants, and other services and goods. That part is difficult to quantify but is most assuredly substantial. I definitely

feel it is an attack on our people economically. People have been able to lift themselves out of poverty through the tobacco trade and now the government wants to make them criminals when this particular product tobacco has been traded amongst us since before the Europeans came over here. This is pure colonialism at its worst. I can almost guarantee that if instead of tobacco we all made widgets that were cheaper and made us a good business, they would make our widgets illegal. It's all about power and control through what I see as illegal monetary sanctions, and it's really another form of oppression."

Chief Abram concludes, "We have to continue on our rights based agenda as Onkwehon:we people in this country. AANDC is spending 100 million dollars a year on legal fighting us now as it is and that's not sustainable. If we keep pressure on, soon enough Canada will have to come to terms that it's time to take a new look at the relationship and by new I really mean old in terms of the Two Row and how that is supposed to work. This father/child false paradigm informed by the discriminatory Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius was always doomed to failure."

As of Friday, Six Nations Elected Chief Hill has not received any

word from the Confederacy Chiefs regarding their stance on the issue. However, it was resolved at the last Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs meeting at the first of the month, that there would be a position paper forthcoming on the issue.

Six Nations will be hosting the next Iroquois Caucus in two weeks where more details will be discussed and options weighed.

Association of Iroquois and Allied Nations Grand Chief Gord Peters also spoke out against C-10, and stands in solidarity with the Iroquois Caucus and its action plan.

The AIAI are expected to have a media release sent out soon representing Batchewana First

Nation, Caldwell First Nation, Delaware Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Oneida of the Thames, Mississaugas of the New Credit, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and Wahta Mohawks.

Chief Greg Peters at Moraviantown of the Thames, has this to say about it.

"We are opposed to any legislation without consultation and accommodation," he says. "This is nothing less than a trade and commerce sanction against our people. Anytime we start to move ahead, they (government) step in with their power and control and their 'we know what's best' attitude. Tobacco has always been a trade item with our people."