

Native military suggested for facing confrontations

By Jack Aubry
Ottawa Citizen

Dec. 13/90

OTTAWA — Canadian natives should establish their own national army for confrontations like this summer's Oka crisis, the Assembly of First Nations was told Wednesday.

Chief Roger Jones of the Shawanaga reserve in Northern Ontario told a meeting of national chiefs that natives across the country must be prepared to respond with their own military in future clashes with the Canadian government.

The proposal, which was not put to a vote, went unchallenged by other chiefs. Several chiefs said later that the idea is being discussed by natives across the country and it is not considered radical or foolish.

"We have to let the rest of this country know that we do mean business about protecting our land," Jones said.

He said native leaders could use its military as "leverage" in future negotiations.

Jones warned that without it, "we'll be talking with the government for the next 100 years."

Jones said the military would be a useful way to harness the

energy of native youth, who would be trained on reserves across the country for future clashes.

The assembly of chiefs approved a "national crisis strategy," which would include fundraising and running newspaper ads.

The strategy would set up a "control centre" and provide support for the community involved in any crisis.

Jones said a national native army could be part of that support.

Georges Erasmus, national chief of the assembly, did not dismiss the idea of creating a military, saying "you never know, it may actually happen."

"I don't know if we will ever have that at the national level but it is being looked at very, very seriously in different parts of the country," he said.

The assembly of chiefs in Manitoba approved a resolution in November to form its own provincial police force.

Ovid Mccredi, spokesman for the Manitoba chiefs, said natives do not want to be caught unprepared "the next time" when the Canadian government utilizes its

army against them.

"We were naive at Oka. We never thought they would use the army against their own citizens," he said. "They will never invade our lands again without a response."

Mccredi said the chiefs were frustrated during the Oka crisis because they were mere commentators on the event. The next time they want to be participants.

Joe Miskokomon, Grand Council Chief of the Union of Ontario Indians, told the assembly that they must put together a strategy to use violence in response to aggression from the Canadian government.

"If there is military advancement on any one of our communities by this country . . . we should start taking down the infrastructure of this country — the railroads, the hydro, the water lines, the gas lines, the corporate structure," he said.

Resolutions approved by the more than 150 native chiefs at the three-day meeting indicate that anger and frustration continues to mount against the federal government.

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