

Elijah Harper urges end to violence at reserves

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OKA, Que. (CP) — Natives and sympathizers gathered Sunday under a blistering sun to verbally bash the federal government for lack of involvement in a land claims dispute which has grown into a three-week armed standoff with police.

Native organizers said about 2,500 people attended the rally while provincial police put the count at less than 1,000. Organizers had originally predicted 10,000 demonstrators would participate.

Elijah Harper, a prominent Manitoba Cree, decried the use

of violence in the conflict which saw the Mohawks of the nearby Kahnésatake settlement erect barricades to stop the expansion of an Oka golf course onto land they claim. One provincial police officer was killed when police stormed the roadblock on July 11.

"We speak the loudest and the bravest when we speak without violence and guns," the perspiring Harper told the crowd as he was fanned with a feather by a woman.

"It is hard for me to believe that in this democratic country of ours such a thing is happening to our brothers in Oka. I can't imagine that a democratic country would let this happen," he said.

Other native leaders suggested the use of force was inevitable.

"If we have to arm ourselves and defend ourselves, that will be done because nobody else wants to defend us," said Joe Norton, grand chief of the Kahnawake Mohawk reserve whose members have blocked a main bridge leading to Montreal in solidarity with the Oka Mohawks since the dispute erupted.