

Mohawk group releases demands

Sovereignty, bingo halls are on hard-liners' list Aug



CP Photo

Two soldiers walk near a sign reading "Let us live in peace with our Mohawk friends" at Oka.

fall, violates Quebec law because it is unlicensed and offers prizes of up to \$25,000, far exceeding provincial limits on games of chance. Customers have been arrested and charges laid against the hall operators.

Mohawks who refuse to recognize Canadian law see their economic future in super bingo and the sale of cigarettes smuggled tax-free from the United States.

"Since we, the Mohawk Nation, are not under Quebec or Canadian jurisdiction," the Mohawk Nation Office affirmed Tuesday, "we refuse to pay tax or royalties to any foreign governments."

It's not clear if traditionalists outnumber more moderate band members.

Both are represented in ongoing talks with federal and provincial representatives to end blockades at the Mercier bridge and Oka, Que.

"We are not aware of these demands so we can make no comments on them," said federal negotiator Bernard Roy.

Mohawk sovereignty is at odds with the federal government's obligation to uphold law and order.

"What this is, in fact, is a separatist crisis," said Michael Bliss, a history professor at the University of Toronto.

But simply standing by and letting the Mohawks secede "can't be tolerated or you would have chaos."

To uphold respect for law and order, the government would be "absolutely compelled to enforce the laws of Canada on Canadian territory,"

Mohawks say there is far more at stake.

The band had a right to protect what it considers their territory, said Karistanoron.

The Mohawk constitution — an agreement called the Gayanerekowa dates back 1,000 years, long before the colonization of North America and the Canadian Constitution, Karistanoron said.

"It is under our constitution to protect our lands, our rights and our people.

OTTAWA — A sovereign nation — in effect a country within Canada — is the bottom line for a hard-line Mohawk faction in negotiations to end armed standoffs in Quebec.

"We are asserting our sovereignty," said Karistanoron, a spokesman for the Mohawk Nation Office at the Kahnawake reserve, where Mohawk Warriors have barricaded the Mercier bridge.

"We're not asking permission. . . . "We no longer want to live under their (white) rules."

Traditionalists within the Longhouse, and organization that includes chiefs, clan mothers and the Mohawk Warriors, are demanding recognition as an autonomous nation with its own government, territory, military and police — and their own laws, Karistanoron said.

At Oka, northwest of Montreal, troops lounged in the sunshine as negotiations resumed between the federal and Quebec governments and the Mohawk Indians.

The army moved in Monday to replace the Quebec police who had been manning positions in Oka and at Kahnawake, south of Montreal, since a failed police raid on an Oka barricade July 11 in which a policeman was killed.

Karistanoran, who uses a single Mohawk name, said freedom for the currently illegal Mohawk giant bingo parlor is an issue in the talks. Later, he qualified this and said the case of the bingo palace on the Kahnawake reserve is an example of police harassment.

The bingo hall, opened last