

Mohawks denied preliminary hearing

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ST-JEROME, Que. (CP) — Forty-one Mohawks charged in connection with last summer's armed standoff at Oka have been sent to trial without a preliminary hearing.

The fast-track procedure prompted Loran Thompson, a Warrior Society leader and one of those charged, to accuse Quebec of violating rights and corralling Mohawks into "political court."

Thompson, 43, and fellow Warrior leader Joe Deom, 53, learned of the change Monday when they showed up for their preliminary hearings but were served with new indictments instead.

The legal procedure, called a preferred indictment, allows Quebec's attorney-general to order accused persons directly to trial without a preliminary hearing. A preliminary hearing is held to determine whether there is enough evidence to warrant a trial.

James O'Reilly, a native-rights lawyer, called the indictment discriminatory and a "political

gesture to punish the Mohawks."

"It's typical of the Quebec government's attitude toward the Mohawks (which is) to crush them," he said.

Deom accused Quebec of using the court system to persecute the Mohawks. "We feel discriminated against as native people," he said.

Prosecutor Pierre Teasdale said the procedure has been used at least three times in St-Jerome, north of Montreal, in the last 10 years.

But Teasdale refused to comment on the reasons for preferred indictment.

The charges include participation in a riot, obstructing peace officers, possession of firearms with a dangerous intent, uttering threats and assaulting police officers and members of the Canadian Forces.

The preferred indictment was the second setback for the Mohawks in their legal battle. The first came last Tuesday when many of their lawyers quit because they weren't being paid.