

Mohawks get tax exemption

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CORNWALL ISLAND, Ont. (CP) — Mohawks on the Akwesasne reserve now are exempted from paying taxes and duties on personal goods they bring over from the United States, the federal government said Friday.

The concession was one of several announced by Shirley Martin, the former junior minister of Indian affairs and northern development, that are intended to resolve some long-standing disputes between the federal government and residents on the reserve, which straddles Ontario, Quebec and the United States.

Martin, who made the announcements on behalf of junior Indian affairs minister Monique Landry, said the government has formally accepted conditions laid out by Akwesasne Grand Chief Mike Mitchell.

"Over the past three to four years, numerous discussions have been held on the subject of a remission order that would address the unique geographic circumstances of Akwesasne and exempt reserve residents from paying taxes and duties on such goods," said Martin.

The order also includes exemption from the goods and services tax.

Mitchell has maintained that the right of Akwesasne residents to bring personal goods across the border without duties or taxes was guaranteed in a pre-Confederation treaty. Customs officials have periodically insisted duty be paid.

Martin also announced Revenue Canada will repay income taxes deducted from Mohawks employed as maintenance workers by the Seaway International Bridge Corp.

"This measure is intended to correct past inequities in which some of the commission's Mohawk employees have been exempted from paying income tax, while others have not," Martin said.

Another announcement was in relation to problems Mohawks have experienced with traffic congestion on the International Bridge, the only link between the island reserve and Canada.

Arrangements have been made for Mohawks to notify Canada Customs during an emergency and a lane will be cleared for emergency vehicles. As well, a third lane will be opened to traffic during peak times, she said.

"Fighting these battles one at a time have taken up a lot of my schedule, but it's been worth it to be stubborn," Mitchell said.