

Highway #6 demonstration ends peacefully

By Jim Windle

HALDIMAND - Traffic on Highway #6 at Fourth Line Road was shut down over the weekend by the Six Nations Men's Fire. The idea was to draw attention to an estimated 1,200 missing and murdered Indigenous women across Canada over the past 30 years.

The demonstration was part of a weekend of action, which spread across Canada, taking many different forms, designed to apply more pressure on Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper to call for a national inquiry into the cold case files of missing or murdered Indigenous women. To date, Harper has ignored all diplomatic attempts to speak to the issue, organizers say, leaving direct action the only alternative.

At 9 am Saturday morning, the Men's Fire of Six Nations and supporters began to muster at the busy

intersection with flags and banners unfurled. OPP had been informed two weeks beforehand that the two-day demonstration would take place so there would be no misunderstandings or surprises.

Messages were also sent through the media to Caledonia and area residents asking for patience and understanding, explaining the action was not directed towards them in any way, but was necessary since all other avenues have been ignored by the federal Conservative government.

Haldimand Mayor Ken Hewitt was certainly not pleased with the action, suggesting in the media other means of getting their point across. But at around 9:30am Saturday morning the highway was closed.

There was some tension initially when OPP Sgt. Belynda Rose read a



A two day demonstration started on Saturday morning to draw attention to an estimated 1,200 Onkwehon:we women who have been murdered or have gone missing over the past 30 years across Canada. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

traffic law to Men's Fire member Bill Monture in the middle of the closed highway, informing him that he and others could be charged should they not remove themselves from the road.

"We are here in support of the issue of the missing and murdered Indigenous women," Monture told Sgt. Rose. "It's been months and years and still nobody is dealing with it."

He then turned to what he believes is his authority and duty to protect his people.

"My Great Law, the Gayanashagowa, says I am entitled to do what I need to do to bring this awareness to what is going on in this country against our Aboriginal women. That is why we are here," he told her. "If you have an issue (with this blockade) take it to your government and tell them. This is only for today and tomorrow. The next time it might be indefinitely."

Sgt. Rose continued to try and persuade Monture and the 60 or more people with him to stand down, but to no avail.

"Be patient with us, and remind yourselves, of who you are and who we are," Monture respectfully but firmly responded. "Because this road you are standing on is called Plank Road and it is owned by us, not by your local, pro-

vincial or federal governments. It is our land."

Rose told Monture, "I am asking you politely to move off the highway. We are here for your safety. You can find a better way of making your point that blocking Highway #6." Monture responded, "I'm a big boy. I can take care of myself. If your government and if your cops can prove to me that there is a better way of doing this, show me. Then I wouldn't need to be here away from my family. What about the families of the women who are missing and murdered, how do they feel? Nobody seems to give a shit about them. But you're worried about a highway that don't mean nothing. We are talking about the lives of our women."

Monture then turned the tables on the police, inviting them to join them, rather than oppose the

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demonstration.

"What you should be doing is supporting everything we are doing there instead of coming here to try and lay some charges," he said. "Go ahead. Lay all the charges you want against me. My name is Bill Monture. That is my English name. My traditional name is Karihwanonon. Take that to your leader, but this highway is staying shut down today and tomorrow. End of discussion."

After attempting to serve papers on Monture, who refused them, the OPP pulled back from the intersection and set up roadblocks further down Highway #6 in both directions to divert traffic. There were no attempts made by the OPP to clear the roadway by force and as the demonstration continued into the night, the only contact police made was to ensure the protesters that they would be on hand should they be needed.

Some had anticipated possible backlash from a certain element of Caledonia citizens who have been provoking the peace at the former Douglas Creek Estates lands, located just down the highway from the road block. Fortunately, there was no such negative response.

"We ended it at around 5 pm Sunday to attend a vigil that was being held at Veteran's Park," said Men's Fire member Lester Green. "We made our point and the response was overwhelming."

Traffic was not entirely closed at the intersection. Motorists were allowed through coming from 4th Line Road where the Men's Fire handed out fliers explaining the action and the need for a national inquiry to more than 1,400, mostly non-Native, travelers.

Amongst those standing in support of the missing and murdered women were Six Nations lawyer and former president of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) Bev Jacobs and her niece, Kaweryne.

"Non-Indigenous people don't understand," she said. "I am angry; I'm pissed off that we have to keep doing this to get people to understand and

care. That's what I want. I want people to care about what is happening to our women."

Jacobs has been trying every possible diplomatic means of bringing this issue to the attention of mainstream Canada since 2002.

"I see movement at the grassroots with things like this (blockade), taking action at the community level, taking the responsibility to organize," she said. "But at the government level, it just keeps getting worse. It is producing nothing when all they want to do is sweep it aside. It creates animosity and continues the mistrust. I think they need to step up to the plate and I'm hopeful, with the election, the Liberals can get back in. I don't know. They may at least try. But we just continue to wait. For me, I'm not going to wait for the government, I'm not going to wait for the ones who make decisions."

Her personal push for an inquiry started when she wrote a 2002 report for the Native Women's Association of Canada for the United Nation Special Rapporteur on Indigenous people's rights and freedoms.

Jacobs became president of NWAC in 2004 where she served until retiring from her post in 2009.

"I think Stephen Harper is a liar," she said candidly. "I have sat side by side with him and I was not comfortable even standing beside him. I don't trust him. I don't think he has an understanding of the history of our people and I don't think he wants to."

Jacobs came in support of the Men's Fire and those who took part in the demonstration.

The blockade was to have remained in place until 9 pm, Sunday, but was voluntarily removed early, opening the highway to regular traffic at around 5 pm.

The Men's Fire thanks those businesses and residents along Fourth Line Road and the affected area on Highway #6 for their patience and understanding.