

FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON KANESATAKE NEGOTIATIONS ACCEPTED BY
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

OTTAWA (February 19, 1991) -- Indian Affairs and Northern Development Minister Tom Siddon today informed the parliamentary Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs that a framework agreement to guide the ongoing negotiations at Oka had been referred to the Mohawk community of Kanesatake for ratification.

"Last Thursday, the federal negotiator and Kanesatake Mohawk Coalition representatives agreed to a framework document designed to establish the parameters for negotiation of the land issue, economic development requirements and self-government," stated Mr. Siddon. "The agreement is acceptable to me if it is acceptable to the community," he added. The Coalition is in the process of referring the document to the Mohawk community of Kanesatake for ratification.

With respect to the events of the past summer, the Minister emphasized that the federal government acted quickly and honourably to resolve the land issue which sparked the Oka crisis.

The Minister underlined that "the events at Kanesatake and Kahnawake were essentially issues of law and order." He added, "It is simply unacceptable for any group in Canada -- native or non-native -- to take up arms to make a political point. That was the view of the federal government when the blockades went up, and it is our view today."

The Minister described the two-year effort to resolve the land issue before the violence erupted -- efforts that were thwarted by dissention in the Kanesatake community. He noted that since the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of the day accepted the community's request for "custom" elections to replace the democratic system in 1969, there has been ongoing conflict among various factions at Kanesatake. The Minister pointed out that band government in the community has changed more than once a year since 1986.

Describing federal efforts to resolve the land matter over the summer of 1990, the Minister detailed numerous splits in the community: "Proposals put forward by one group were quickly disavowed by another. There were charges and counter-charges of deliberate misrepresentation of community views, of outside interference by other native groups in the band's affairs. Violence was an ever-present threat, and even the Mohawk people could not agree on, or identify, their legitimate leaders."

Mr. Siddon told committee members that the land issue at Kanesatake came very close to being resolved in the fall of 1989 when a framework agreement had been agreed to by negotiators for the federal government, the municipality, the province and the Band Council.

However, in January 1990, before the agreement could be ratified by the Kanesatake community, the clan mothers replaced the chief and council who then requested an indefinite postponement of negotiations. This was the seventh time in five years that the clan mothers had replaced the chief and council.

Following this set-back, Mr. Siddon personally intervened on several occasions. In May the Minister met with the Honorable John Ciaccia, Quebec Minister of Indian Affairs. In June he met separately with representatives of the municipality and the band council. In late June he contacted the Mayor of Oka and the Chief of the Kanesatake Council, urging them to discuss ways of defusing the tensions.

Mr. Siddon explained that his own jurisdiction and mandate was limited to the land issue and that this matter was resolved by August 8, 1990.

Federal efforts resulted in agreements to purchase 106 acres of land at Oka, including the parcels of land containing the Indian cemetery and the golf course expansion -- the land at the heart of the dispute.

The Minister emphasized that "the violence of last summer delayed important work that had been in preparation for some time -- the federal native agenda." It was only in September that the Prime Minister was finally able to announce this major initiative.

Mr. Siddon outlined progress on the agenda -- "progress that has resulted from serious and meaningful discussions and negotiations between First Nations and the government."

Mr. Siddon noted that as recently as last week, he had met separately with representatives of the Coalition, the band council and the Longhouse in efforts to encourage the healing process in the Mohawk community.

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Chronologies, outlining federal action, are attached.