Nishnawbe Aski Nation
ᐊᓂᔑᓇᐯ ᐊᔅᑭ ᐃᔅᑯᓂᑲᓇᓐ ᐅᑭᒪᐧᐃᓐ
100 Back Street, Unit 200, Thunder Bay, ON P7J 1L2
Tel: (807) 623-8228 Fax: (807) 623-7730 www.nan.on.ca

NEWS RELEASE

Monday August 20, 2007 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NAN AND ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES OF TORONTO TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC INQUIRY

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler together with Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST) Executive Director Kimberly Murray announced today their joint standing in a public inquiry into Ontario's pediatric pathology system as granted by Justice Stephen Goudge Friday.

"There has been silence for too long regarding the inadequacy of investigations into the deaths of children in NAN communities – this standing gives us a voice," said NAN Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler who's responsible for the justice portfolio at NAN – an Aboriginal political organization representing 49 First Nation communities across Ontario.

The commission of inquiry was set up by the Province of Ontario after a coroner's review found child pathologist Dr. Charles Smith erred in 20 of 45 autopsies conducted from 1981 to 2001. In 13 of those cases, people were convicted of crimes, including killing their own children.

NAN and ALST represent the diverse interests of Aboriginal people and communities, combining the perspectives of on-reserve and off-reserve, northern and southern, urban and rural, political/territorial and service providers within the Aboriginal community of Ontario.

"The granting of standing to the ALST-NAN Coalition is an important step in improving the Aboriginal community's confidence in the Coroner's system and is in line with Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs by fostering a respectful relationship with our community," said ALST Executive Director Kimberly Murray.

The rate of infant and preschooler deaths within Aboriginal communities is 4 to 5 times higher than in non-Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal infants are three times more likely to have Sudden Infant Death Syndrome than non-Aboriginal infants.

NAN and ALST together are one of 12 groups and individuals that received standing by Justice Goudge Friday. Other groups include Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, Criminal Lawyers' Association, Group of Affected Families, Association in Defense of the Wrongly Convicted, Hospital for Sick Children, Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association, Defense for Children International Canada, and the Province of Ontario.

Hearings will begin November 2007.

***

For more information please contact:

Jenna Young
Director of Communications
Nishnawbe Aski Nation
(807) 625 4952 or (807) 628 3953 (mobile)

Kimberly Murray
Executive Director
Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto
(416) 408-4041 ext 225