Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday February 20, 2008 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NAN DEMANDS ONTARIO SETTLES ARDOCH LAND DISPUTE

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Stan Beardy demands the Premier of Ontario negotiate a settlement regarding the ongoing land dispute on traditional Ardoch Algonquin First Nation (AAFN) territory, rather than using the courts to delay a political solution.

"The solution to unsettled land claims is not jail time or fines," said NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy. "We're in a situation where First Nation people are being criminalized for practising constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights – our way of life on the land. These extreme positions by Ontario to support court proceedings rather than negotiating settlements could seriously jeopardize new meaningful relationships not only in Algonquin territory, but across the province."

Beardy's comments come after AAFN negotiator Robert Lovelace was yesterday sentenced six months in jail and fined $25,000 for his participation in a peaceful protest over uranium exploration on Algonquin traditional territory (eastern Ontario).

The actions leading to yesterday's sentencing of the AAFN member are comparable to James Bay Treaty 9 community Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) and its litigation between mining exploration company Platinex Inc. and the Government of Ontario – a story that's made national news since the northern First Nation community approx. 600 km north of Thunder Bay was hit with a $10 billion lawsuit in February 2006 after requesting Platinex Inc. remove drilling equipment from their traditional territory.

Similar to the situation in eastern Ontario, KI leadership currently awaits an expected April 2008 sentencing for a December 2007 contempt charge as they fulfill their sacred responsibility to the land.

"What the Government of Ontario and general public need to realize is that our people have a sacred responsibility to the land. It's not that we operate outside of Canadian law, however the laws of our lands come first," said Beardy, adding that injustice at Ardoch and with KI is a threat to justice for First Nations not only within Ontario, but across Canada.

"The court decisions coming out of Ardoch and KI affect all First Nations," said Beardy. "What kind of message is the Government of Ontario sending when it consistently ignores Supreme Court of Canada rulings to consult and accommodate First Nations prior to development?"

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities part of James Bay Treaty 9 and Ontario portions of Treaty 5.

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