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NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday May 13, 2009 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NAN CONCERNED OVER GROWING PREVALENCE OF RACISM IN THUNDER BAY

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose is concerned over the growing prevalence of racism in Thunder Bay following a police investigation into a racially motivated conflict involving local schools.

"There is a disturbing trend of racism becoming more prevalent in educational institutions, local businesses and on the streets of this community," said Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose. "We hope to help diffuse this systemic racism by engaging with the Thunder Bay community in a positive, proactive manner that is both appropriate and culturally sensitive."

The Thunder Bay Police Service is conducting an investigation into what it has called a "racially motivated conflict" involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth who have allegedly made threatening remarks on social networking sites. The investigation comes after several reports of racial discrimination involving schools, businesses and incidents on city streets.

Lakehead Public Schools distributed a letter Tuesday advising parents and guardians of the police investigation. The letter urges parents and guardians to speak to children about the seriousness of violent acts and racially motivated remarks on the Internet and in the community.

"The Thunder Bay community has a growing First Nations population and it is time that we come together to address issues of racism, but we can't do that if people insist on labelling people as 'Aboriginal' or 'non-Aboriginal.' This creates an us-versus-them mentality that can only exacerbate these problems," said Waboose. "We are encouraged that Lakehead Public Schools and the Thunder Bay Police Service are taking this issue seriously. But rather than treat this situation as an isolated incident, we need to use this issue as a springboard from which to launch a collaborative approach between NAN, the City of Thunder Bay, local schools and police services to keep Thunder Bay a culturally diverse community that respects the rights of all citizens."

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities in James Bay Treaty 9 and Ontario portions of Treaty 5 – an area covering two thirds of the province of Ontario.

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