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West Ipperwash, Ontario
March 13, 1996

An open letter to the governments of Canada and Ontario

Dear Elected Representatives:

I am a resident of West Ipperwash, Ontario, a community comprised of a small indian reserve, some seasonal cottagers, and several hundred permanent residents (many of whom are retired). My home and my community have been hurt by the actions (and lack of action) of my federal and provincial governments in two ways:

First, I have been sued by the local native band, the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point, seeking return of my home to the reserve plus monetary damages for trespass on what is claimed to be unsurrendered reserve land.

This claim is based on what the band claims were irregularities in the 1927 surrender of the land to the crown for subsequent sale to two non-native developers. I purchased my home in 1987 for value and without notice by the band that legal action was contemplated or that any question existed as to title of the land; now I must defend myself at considerable expense against the band's lawsuit. My fellow defendants (there are 112 homes involved in the lawsuit) and I have appealed to the government of Canada without success for action to settle the claim or at the very least to compensate the innocent home owners for our financial losses. It is still possible we may all lose our homes, without compensation, through no fault of our own.

Second, the government of Ontario's mishandling of the occupation of Ipperwash Provincial Park in negotiations, 1995 has led to violence and hostilities in my community. Premier Harris refused to negotiate with the occupiers, electing instead to send in a large, heavily armoured police contingent. The results of this decision are, I think, well-known to all Canadians. A minor act of civil disobedience by a few disgruntled but well-intentioned individuals became a symbol of racism and injustice that will not soon be forgotten. Premier Harris is directly responsible for the death and ??? that has come to my community.

I appeal to both levels of government to act to serve the public they represent, both native and non-native. Further indifference to these problems can only lead to further escalation of tensions.

Submitted Respectfully By,

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