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D E C L A R A T I O N o f N I S H N A W B E - A S K I

(The People and the Land)

By the Ojibway-Cree Nation of Treaty No. 9 to the People of Canada
Delivered by the Chiefs of Grand Council Treaty No. 9
To Ontario Premier William Davis and His Cabinet in the City of
Toronto, Wednesday 6 July 1977.

CANADA:

We will use a second language to speak to you, in recognition of your inability to understand our language.

Once again we want you to understand us.

For over 350 years you have failed to recognize the unique lifestyle of the Nishnawbe-Aski. It is so Crucial that you understand today as tomorrow may be too late.

We, the people and the land, declare our nationhood. We, of the Cree and Ojibway nation who come from within your boundaries of Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec, and who live in the Ontario North at the height of land known as the Arctic Watershed, declare ourselves to be a free and sovereign nation. We bring you a declaration of independence.

We say to you that we have the right to govern our own spiritual, cultural, social and economic affairs. We will describe to you how we are going to secure our sovereignty. We are also here because we want your government to play a role, in our return to our form of self-government. We ask that you become involved in our right to develop our individual communities. We intend to make them as viable as they were before the white man came. You are the only people who have ever questioned our sovereignty. Our rights and entitlements to this land were inherited from our forefathers. Unlike you, we have no memory of an existence in other lands across the sea. We have prior rights to the custody of this land, which precede and supersede all of your claims.

This custody must remain with us. It is our sacred duty to pass it on to our unborn children. We do not accept the illegal seizures of our land by the Europeans, and their descendants. We will protect these custodian rights by whatever means necessary.

We declare that all laws, rules, regulations, orders-in-council and acts passed on or enacted by you, and your federal, provincial and territorial governments, which interfere with our sovereignty, must be re-examined in the light of our position. The right to make laws which govern our people must be returned to

our people.

On having regained the ability to govern ourselves we will insist that Treaty No. 9 be renegotiated. Your government has refused to live up to the terms, and the spirit of the Treaty. This Treaty reads in part, that "His Majesty the King hereby agrees with the said Indians that they shall have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing throughout the land."

We agreed to share. We lived up to the terms of our agreement. We kept the peace, paid honour to the European sovereign, allowed the white man to settle and live according to his laws, and permitted his religions and cultures to be introduced to our people.

You agreed to share. You said our rights would never be lost. You did not live up to the agreement. You took most of our land, outlawed our religious beliefs and practices, destroyed much of our animal life and forest, restricted our movements, stopped us from using our languages, and tried to convince us that our music, dances, and arts were barbaric.

Despite these overwhelming odds, we have survived the elements of conquest.

Your cultural genocide is about to end. In order to regain our freedom we must establish our own control, and return to our traditional philosophy of life. We recognize only one ruler over our nation -- the Creator. He made us part of nature. We are one with nature, with all that the Creator has made around us. We have lived here since time immemorial, at peace with the land, the lakes and the rivers, the animals, the fish, the birds and all of nature. We live today as part of yesterday and tomorrow in the great cycle of life.

Unlike you, we have a sacred respect for the land. You have alienated life and land by the exploitation of the natural resources. As a result of your greed there is a real possibility that our environment will be destroyed. If it is, we also will be destroyed because we are part of nature.

In 1977, Chief Simeon McKay stated "Today, we are here realizing that there is somebody here on earth that wants to destroy everything on us. Remember what our grandfather has told us: we should try and retain what the Great Spirit has provided for us. We are trying to keep and retain our ancestors' ways before this means of livelihood is destroyed."

In your rush for materialistic gain, you are threatening nature's very limits. Now, it is our sacred duty to slow you down before she is destroyed.

In chief Emile Nakogee's statement of 1977 he said, "I am not against employment, it is a good thing. But the most important thing we must take into consideration is the land around us. It is also our income and we must not make decisions that might

destroy it."

We are here with another unalterable principle: "Nishnawbe-Aski are not for sale!" We remember the legacy of Old Joseph, as he spoke to his son Chief Joseph in 1871: "My son, my body is returning to my Mother Earth, and my spirit is going very soon to see the Great Spirit Chief. When I am gone, think of your country. You are the chief of these people. They look to you to guide them. Always remember that your father never sold his country...this country holds your father's body. Never sell the bones of your father and your mother."

This is a sad day, but we have been a sad people for many years. However, to our people, today is also an historical day. It is not often that a nation makes a formal declaration of independence.

We are not a new nation like you.

Only a few days ago we watched as you celebrated your Canada Day, and as we did, we thought what Canada Day meant to us. To the Treaty No. 9 Cree and Ojibway, 110 years of our disintegration. While you celebrated we felt anger, frustration, regret and tolerance

We can no longer permit the progressive rape of our mother earth, and its life-giving forces. We have our children to save.

The continued existence of our race is a sacred mandate passed on to us by our ancestors.

Today our relationship with you must change. We will only accept your meaningful involvement. It will be on our terms, or not at all.

To ensure our survival on the land we say that our aboriginal hunting and fishing rights will never be taken away. We do not recognize the fish and game laws which have eroded our way of life. We encourage and support our people: (a) to hunt and fish in any part of Treaty No. 9 for their own consumption during any season; (b) to trap anywhere in the Treaty No. 9 area; and (c) to trap without the infringement of tax regulations. If necessary, we will encourage our people to fill your courtrooms in our fight for our aboriginal rights.

We will defend our right to self-determination. However, we realize that this self-determination may take many different forms. Therefore, we are open to new, and innovative directions.

Only in this context are we prepared to establish the legislative foundation of local government.

The success of our future will depend on our leaders of tomorrow. These young people are adjusting to new forms of knowledge. Our experience will also strengthen their involvement.

We expect that you in turn will encourage your young people to

understand our lifestyle.

Today we are here to tell you who we are. We, the Nishnawbe-Aski, have inalienable rights. They are:

1. the right to self-government;
2. the right to receive compensation for our exploited natural resources;
3. the right to receive compensation for the destruction and abrogation of our hunting and fishing rights;
4. the right to re-negotiate our treaty;
5. the right to negotiate with the elected governments of your society through appropriate levels of representation;
6. the right to approach the judicial, governmental and business institutions of your society in our quest for self-determination and local control;
7. the right of our elected chiefs to deal with your society's elected cabinets on an equal basis;
8. the right to approach other world nations to further the aims of the Cree and Ojibway nations of Treaty No. 9;
9. the right to use every necessary alternative to further the cause of our people;
10. the right to use all that the creator has given us to help all of mankind.

The solutions to our problems must come from within our local communities. The right to deal with those problems must rest with our people. We will regain our independence only through legislation that recognizes and supports our form of local government.

Our nationhood itself is sacred and cannot be negotiated. However, we are ready to start negotiating the implementation of this nationhood. For any nation to exist, it must have legislation that enhances its self-reliance and its local control.

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