



Tsi Nahò:ten Karihwanákere Nó:nen'k

PRESS RELEASE

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Grand Chief Norton on 30th anniversary of ‘Oka Crisis’

For immediate release

(Kahnawake – 10, Ohiarikhó:wa/July 2020) The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke wishes to issue the following statement from Grand Chief Joseph Tokwiwo Norton in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the ‘Oka Crisis,’ which began on July 11, 1990:

“There is much to consider thirty years after the life-changing events that took place in the summer of 1990. It was a time that no one who lived through it can forget. And we shouldn’t forget. After centuries of attempts to assimilate our people, the final straw came when the Surete du Québec attempted to remove a peaceful protest in Kanesatake where people were trying to stop the expansion of a golf course that would have destroyed The Pines, long recognized as a sacred place by the people there.

The solidarity shown by our community towards our brothers and sisters in Kanesatake was immediate. While the choices were difficult and not always popular, our people persevered and refused to capitulate. Yes, we suffered from extreme hardships during that time. We saw the ugly side of our neighbors as many of them took part in nightly events of hatred, culminating in one of the darkest chapters in Quebec and Canadian history as a caravan of elders, women and children were attacked with stones and bricks as they attempted to leave the community – ironically – for their own safety, with police officers standing idly by. The memory of that will stay with me until my dying day.

It must be said, however, that there were many gestures of support and solidarity shown by other non-native people. People like the late John Ciaccia did their utmost to help and there were many who condemned the actions of the political bodies and racists who did their best to break our spirit. To those people, we say ‘Niá:wen.’

While there as been some progress in the 30 years that have followed, it is clear that Quebec and Canada still have a long way to go in addressing our long-standing disagreements. Racism is still an issue. The lack of respect that continues to be shown by governments when dealing with Indigenous people astounds me. People who should know better continue to deny that there is systemic racism against our people. This needs to change, and it must change now.

There are bright spots. The annual Echoes of a Proud Nation Powwow was created as a means of healing and reconciliation, as has been a great success in bringing our cultures together. We must do our best to keep these doors open, despite the challenges that we continue to face.

In closing, I’d like to commend those who stood up during that fateful time, many of whom have now passed on. We remained peaceful, strong and united. Our actions stand as a monument to those who came before us. It was their spirits that guided us. We continue to call on them to provide guidance for the future.”

Current Grand Chief Joseph Tokwiwo Norton was Grand Chief in 1990. He continues to fight for the rights of Kahnawà:kehronon and Indigenous people across Canada.