



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 21, 2010

Ontario Federation of Labour urges working people to participate in Aboriginal Solidarity Day

(TORONTO) The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) is urging all working people to participate in Aboriginal Solidarity Day. Aboriginal Solidarity Day—otherwise known as National Aboriginal Day—was proclaimed by the federal government in 1996 after years of lobbying by the Assembly of First Nations (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood). Fourteen years ago, June 21 was designated as a day for celebration, reflection and solidarity with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

“This year, Aboriginal Solidarity Day falls on the 20th anniversary of the Oka Crisis,” said Sid Ryan, President of the OFL. “At that time, members of the Mohawk Nation in Kanehsatake, Kahnawake and Akwesasne faced-off against the full force of Canada’s military and police forces just to stop sacred burial grounds from being turned into a golf course.”

The 78-day stand-off involving tear gas and live ammunition resulted in the cancellation of the golf course expansion and paved the way for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The resulting 4,000 page report was published in 1996, making dozens of recommendations to address years of injustice and colonialism. Twenty years later, few of the recommendations have been implemented.

“In Ontario, injustice continues,” said Terry Downey, OFL Executive Vice-President. “There are over 400 “boil water” alerts in Ontario, disproportionately affecting First Nations’ communities. In the Attawapiskat community off the coast of James Bay, it took more than 30 years—and the concerted effort of school children like Shannen Koostachin—to get a school rebuilt after it was contaminated by a diesel spill.”

Here are some startling facts:

- In 2006, the median income for Aboriginal peoples was 30 percent lower than for the rest of Canadians—a difference of over \$8,000 annually.
- Data from the past two censuses show that children in Aboriginal families experience poverty rates significantly higher than the average Ontario rate.
- The infant mortality rate is twice as high for Aboriginals.

/2....

- According to Statistics Canada data released in May 2010, the global economic recession was particularly devastating for First Nations workers in Canada:
 - Between 2008 and 2009 the official unemployment rate among Aboriginal workers increased from 10.4% in 2008 to 13.9% in 2009. By contrast, the official unemployment rate for non-Aboriginal workers rose from 6.0% to 8.1%.
 - In manufacturing, Aboriginal employment fell by 30 % compared to an 8 % decline among non-aboriginal workers.
 - In the construction industry, Aboriginal employment fell by 16%, compared to a 5% decline among non-aboriginal workers.

“This reality underscores the need for all workers to stand together with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters,” said Ryan. “And there are plenty of opportunities to do just that—especially in the lead-up to the G20. The Ontario labour movement will be standing in solidarity with First Nations activists in events planned this week.”

“The Aboriginal community is on the forefront of the environmental movement both in Canada and around the world,” said Downey. “Last year, in Simcoe County, First Nations and their allies stopped a landfill from being built over a natural, pristine artesian aquifer. Right now, First Nations are actively campaigning to stop the destruction wrought by Canada’s Tar Sands.”

“We also want to acknowledge and commend Aboriginal communities for their recent victory, ensuring federal and provincial governments continue the point of sale exemption for First Nations in Ontario under the Harmonized Sales Tax,” said Ryan. “The Ontario labour movement draws strength from the thousands of Aboriginal peoples who comprise our labour movement. On this June 21, we celebrate their accomplishments, their traditions and their resistance. And we reiterate the call for social, economic and environmental justice for all.”

For information about events in the lead-up to the G20 that involve Aboriginal communities and their allies please visit:

<http://www.defendersoftheland.org/>

<http://www.ienearth.org/tarsands.html>

<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/news-room/events/g8-g20-public-rally-and-march>

For more information contact:

Sid Ryan, OFL President: 416-209-0066 (cell)

Terry Downey, OFL Executive Vice-President: 416-443-7650 (cell)

Pam Frache, OFL Communications: 416-578-3472 (cell) or pfrache@ofl.ca (email)