



For Immediate Release

March 24, 2023

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FSIN CALLS FOR ACTION TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatoon, SK – The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) is seeking an apology from Saskatchewan Environment after an Elder's home was raided on the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, near Loon Lake.

On the afternoon of October 7, 2021, Elders Doug Morningchild and his wife were at home preparing for a ceremonial gathering and feast, when several law enforcement vehicles surrounded his house. Ministry of Environment Conservation Officers proceeded to search the box of Morningchild's truck while others were looking through windows into the couple's home.

It looked like a major drug bust or something of that nature by the number of vehicles that were in his yard, says Morningchild.

When Morningchild asked if they had a search warrant, the Conservation Officers told him they did have one, however, they were not able to produce it for him at that time as it was left at their office.

The officers broke the locks on a large deep freezer and proceeded to confiscate all the wild meat from the large freezer and three small freezers.

Elder Morningchild and his wife are well-known in their Nation for holding ceremonial gatherings. Morningchild's wife is a Sundance lodge holder, and they regularly hold feasts for members of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation. The meat was meant to provide sustenance for his family as well as those attending the ceremonies. Morningchild often gifts meat to people in the community because of his stature in the Nation as a ceremonial elder.

According to Morningchild's understanding of the matter, the provincial Ministry of Environment was looking for moose meat that they claim was obtained on private land. When they confiscated the meat the officer told Morningchild they were going to DNA test the wild meat.

Morningchild attended court proceedings related to the raid on January 26, 2023, where the charges against him were dismissed by the judge on a technicality.

FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron says the event was, “an unlawful and racist raid that traumatized an Elder who was upholding cultural traditions.”

To help prevent this type of incident in the future, FSIN is calling for reforms to the Ministry’s protocols and more education within Saskatchewan Environment about Inherent and Treaty rights to hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering and land access.

Morningchild is exploring legal action for punitive damages, however, lawyers have said the cost of pursuing such a matter in the courts is more than the value of the meat.

FSIN has documented several complaints made by First Nations people about mistreatment by Saskatchewan Environment and Conservation Officers. FSIN sent a formal letter to the Ministry June 23, 2020 to urge the Ministry to conduct an impartial inquiry into the complaints. An inquiry into the issue did not occur and FSIN continues to record events of mistreatment of First Nations when exercising Treaty rights.

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“It is disgraceful that one of our Elder’s homes was swarmed and invaded by Ministry of Environment Conservation Officers when they were preparing for a ceremony. We are dismayed that after promises of reconciliation, a miscarriage of justice like this occurred. We need recognition of First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights from the province of Saskatchewan. The Treaties that our ancestors signed, guarantee our rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather year-round to feed our families and for ceremonies. FSIN stands behind Doug Morningchild and his wife, their Nation, and others who are being treated similarly when exercising their Inherent and Treaty rights. We call for more education and policy reforms to ensure no other First Nations people suffer through a traumatizing event such as this,” said FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron.

“What happened to Doug Morningchild and his wife is unacceptable, and it cannot continue. We respect and cherish our Elders, especially when their homes and rights are violated; it erodes our relationships with governments. It is the exact opposite of what reconciliation is about. Many of our people continue to live off the land and hunting is a fundamental promise under Treaty. When an Elders home is raided and they are treated like criminals, it tells me the government’s promises are empty and they aren’t serious about respecting First Nations Inherent and Treaty rights,” said FSIN Vice Chief Heather Bear, Lands and Resources portfolio holder.

About FSIN

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations represents 73 First Nations in Saskatchewan. The Federation is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties, as well as the promotion, protection and implementation of the Treaty promises that were made more than a century ago.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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