

Submission to the Anishinabek News - November 2009 Issue

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Intergovernmental Affairs

Relationships: The Anishinabek Nation and the Anishinabek Police Services

In a democratic society, police are supposed to be motivated by the desire to maintain law and order, protecting civilians from people who choose to bring harm to themselves or others. The motives behind the decisions of the Ontario Provincial Police to murder Dudley George on the night of September 6, 1995, at Ipperwash Provincial Park, have been viewed as a decision of a political nature and not the desire to maintain law and order. Regardless of how one perceives the decisions made that night by the OPP, the decision would become a turning point for First Nations people within our judicial system.

The Ipperwash Inquiry would raise many issues, not only with Dudley George's death but the need for change was no longer a concept that could rest on the back burner, it became imminent. The recommendations given by Justice Linden in his report, which concluded the Ipperwash Inquiry in May of 2007, spoke of enhanced training on the uniqueness of Aboriginal issues, history and culture. Furthermore, Justice Linden insisted that all incidents of racism by officers be reported to their superiors and that the behavior be dealt with publicly or to ensure some form of disciplinary action is taken. The Ipperwash inquiry rose the ultimate question: "Are they here to protect me?"

One year prior to the death of Dudley George, in 1994, Garden River, Curve Lake, Sagamok and Saugeen First Nation ceased to rely on the OPP and formed the Anishinabek Police Services. It was determined that the head office would be in Garden River, which is geographically located in the middle of the province and the First Nation communities the APS would serve. Each community made the decision to form the APS for a variety of reasons, including a desire for community policing and the OPP's inability to provide services that fit the cultural and unique needs of their communities. As of November 2008, there were 16 detachments formed in the Anishinabek Nation.

The primary vision for forming the APS was to have First Nation individuals trained to serve as peacekeepers, not police officers. Although ultimately these peacekeepers were indeed police officers, the concept fit well within First Nation cultures and practices. The APS mandate would be to encourage community involvement, take part in public education and operating transparency. They would request assistance from the OPP when it was deemed necessary but otherwise they were to be the face of police presence on the communities they served.

To date there are 62 sworn officers and 21 civilian members serving the Anishinabek Nation. Communities now have access to a police force that was inspired by First Nations people, ensuring and promoting peace and taking First Nations one step closer to becoming self-governed.

Although the relationship between First Nations and the APS is not flawless, it is important to

understand that the young organization is indeed underfunded in comparison to the funding provided to OPP detachments. The First Nation jurisdiction is substantially much greater than the amount of officers that funding currently permits, regardless of the amount of officers actually required.

No community wants to have a repeat of the tragedy of the loss of Dudley George at Ipperwash. It is with this determination that the Anishinabek Nation and the Anishinabek Police Services are giving back to our communities, one step at a time. The Ipperwash Implementation plan has a First Nation Policing sub working group to continue to address these issues and Justice Linden's recommendations. With this enhanced communication and implementation there is hope of a better relationship for First Nations and law enforcement.