



CHIEFS COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, December 15, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA CHIEFS' COUNCIL CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA TO STOP THE COLONIAL BACKROOM DEALS AND ESTABLISH A DEDICATED FEDERAL CROWN TABLE TO PREPARE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RING OF FIRE REGION AND CRITICAL MINERALS

[Thunder Bay, ON] –At their meeting today, the Matawa Chiefs Council issue the following statement related to the activities of the Governments of Canada, Ontario, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) who are compromising the positions of Indigenous rights holders:

“We have watched and waited patiently for the governments and First Nation political organizations to step up and support the sovereignty of the Matawa Chiefs Council and our communities with the impending development of the Ring of Fire Region and other critical minerals in the remote and rural north of Ontario, land subject to the James Bay Treaty No. 9 (1905-06 and 1929-30).

The past year has unfolded a number of concerning developments that are directly impacting the Matawa member First Nations as Indigenous rights holders at a pivotal and crucial moment in the lives and history of our people and land. The developments that are about to occur in the Matawa traditional territories and homelands are a one-shot deal to correct the wrongs and grievances of our people, past, present and future generations who have waited for our turn to be active participants in a prosperous future that both Canada and Ontario are proclaiming.

Colonial backroom deals have been struck to move forward on the Chiefs of Ontario – Ontario Government Prosperity Table to the tune of \$25 Million, and at the same time the Assembly of First Nations Executive Committee has advanced its own interests and proposed a First Nations National Prosperity Table to the Prime Minister, and positioning itself to carry out the negotiations on the National Benefit-Sharing Framework that was announced Friday December 9 by Minister of Natural Resources Canada the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson within the Critical Minerals Strategy. These developments are all part and parcel of First Nations organizations positioning and aligning themselves to undermine the principled and unified positions of the Matawa Chiefs Council to date.

Most disappointedly, the Matawa Chiefs Council have not received any support in advocacy on these issues that are unique to the remote and rural First Nations from our own Nishnawbe Aski Nation. While advancing a potential resolution to inform and make the positions of Matawa communities known, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation denied us any political, technical or legal supports. In addition, to Canada's dishonour, the funding by Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) of any basic capacity support on this issue has also been declined this year, which is very reminiscent of colonial starvation techniques used to force First Nations into signing Treaty.

The Government of Canada has expended significant effort to orchestrate national processes without the meaningful input and participation of the Indigenous rights holders, who are the lone decision makers and granters of free, prior and informed consent. The AFN First Nations National Prosperity Table (and its COO predecessor), and Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) Critical Minerals Strategy and National

Benefit-Sharing Framework are unacceptable to the Matawa Chiefs Council and the Matawa member First Nations.

Instead, the Matawa Chiefs Council continue to maintain their unified position that the Matawa member First Nations are the Indigenous rights holders in our traditional territories and homelands. We call on the Government of Canada to establish a dedicated federal Crown table with the Matawa Chiefs Council to support the existing community-led processes and protocols to prepare for the development of the Ring of Fire Region and critical minerals throughout our territories. The best approach for all Matawa members and Canadians is a transparent, fair and reconciliatory process that will benefit all of us.

It must be clear to all parties that the Matawa member First Nations are the sovereign lead communities in the development of the Ring of Fire.”

MATAWA LEADERSHIP QUOTES

Elder Ananias Spence, Webequie First Nation

“The Creator has provided us with many gifts and now is the time where we look to our past, the wisdom and knowledge of our ancestors and the visions and dreams of our people to carry us forward. The wealth of our lands is not only the minerals, but it is the water, the trees, the air.”

Chief Wayne Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation

“It was stunning and disappointing that the Critical Minerals Strategy was released by Canada on Friday without any advance notice to the Indigenous rights holders. These are signals that Canada is fast-tracking consent to development and applying pressure to our communities. In an introductory meeting with NRCan last month, our community was assured that we would have an opportunity to have input on this draft. The government is expediting access to land that is stolen, and cutting red-tape that will impede and impact our rights as First Nations. AFN and COO are also encroaching on our lands in Matawa, they are already making decisions for us. The lands in question are Anishnawbe lands that have been stolen from our people.”

Chief Sol Atlookan, Eabametoong First Nation

“Our communities are still struggling in systemic poverty while Canada, Ontario, AFN, and COO prepare for prosperity. This tactic is nothing new, we are still facing the harsh realities and challenges of crumbling infrastructure, lack of housing and the high cost of living. The current state of inflation in Canada has a magnified impact in the remote north on the cost of food, electricity and fuel. If you look at our area, we have all kinds of minerals here, we will be front and center on development. This is a statement to the AFN Executive Committee that you don’t speak on our behalf, this is our land, our home, our livelihood, we grew up here. You don’t do that.”

Chief Judy Desmoulin, Long Lake No. 58 First Nation

“It is time that we advise government that we do not agree with a lot of these things. We are forced to be up against our own at AFN and COO with these divisive agreements that are being advanced without our direction or consent. Critical minerals will impact our remote and road-access communities. Matawa Chiefs Council are united in our concerns. We have to be properly funded for capacity supports in this area, to make properly informed decisions. The funding cut off is like the situation of the Indian Act where we do not have any independent expertise to help our communities where Indians were not allowed to hire lawyers under the Indian Act.”

Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation

“Matawa member First Nations are potentially the region that will be most significantly impacted by Canada’s Critical Mineral Strategy and should be guaranteed a lead position on any national or international discussions on Critical Minerals going forward. Canada is preparing for the emergence of an entirely new industry in Canada and North America. The extraction of chromite and ferrochrome processing that will be required to feed the steel demand in Southern Ontario, and the United States and its allies are important to the green energy transition. Canada must raise the bar on Indigenous participation in major resource development projects beyond the status quo of jobs and training targets, IBAs and procurement contracts to real revenue sharing, ownership and equity partnership agreements.”

Chief Ramona Sutherland, Constance Lake First Nation

“First Nations leadership across Canada should be alerted that the AFN Executive Committee is advancing the Critical Minerals Strategy that will include the negotiations of a National Benefit-Sharing Framework where - our Chiefs - our people - will have to go ‘hat in hand’ to Parliament to beg them to fund it in Budget 2024. This is the further subjugation of our people and our sovereign nations to the Crown. AFN is carrying out negotiations on benefit-sharing, UNDA and the implementation of free, prior and informed consent while Critical Minerals will advance in Canada.”

Chief Sheri Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation

“Ginoogaming First Nation stands with the Chiefs, Councils and community members across Matawa First Nations that our communities will be decision-makers and direct any approach to deal with our lands and ensure that any renewable and non-renewable resources are addressed under the spirit and intent of the James Bay Treaty No. 9 (1905-06 and 1929-30). My ancestors signed the Treaty at Long Lake in 1906, and it is the position of Ginoogaming First Nation that under Treaty No. 9 - we have title to resources and we have resource equity that will benefit our families and future generations yet to come.”

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