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## **Tariffs or no Tariffs, Genuine First Nation Partnerships must be the Backbone of Sustainable Development in Ontario and throughout Canada**

Eabametoong, Ontario

“Respect and wisdom go a long way, although they are becoming rare in these days of self-interest,” reflected Chief Solomon Atlookan and Council from Eabametoong First Nation. “Many politicians are promising change and racing to push new projects without thinking through what positive development is really about – improving quality of life for the long term.”

Yesterday Prime Minister Carney announced his new cabinet, and many in Canadian and Provincial politics have been scrambling to respond to the threats coming from our long time American allies. The leadership of Eabametoong First Nation has written to invite governments and businesses to return their focus to a much deeper and fundamental alliance: Treaty #9 and relationships with First Nations. ***EFN is calling for a ‘war council’ to be formed with the specific focus of promoting the economic and social sustainability of our shared way of life.***

“Our ancestors fought and spilled blood alongside the settler forces in 1812 to preserve our way of life against American expansionism, and we later agreed to a Treaty that promised shared control of our lands and the mutual prosperity of our peoples. Unfortunately, the Crown governments have not lived up to those Treaty promises. It is ironic that today when faced with an unpredictable USA, Canada once again must depend on the First Nations in the north. This time, the request is to serve Canada by enabling resource development. We’ve had politicians vying for national attention in a race to the bottom: promising to strip our country of resources quicker than the other. This is a time for wisdom, respect, and shared steps toward sustainable development – not a chaotic boom and bust cycle that tramples our rights,” said Chief Atlookan and Council.

Eabametoong First Nation is located in an area of high mineral and other resource values, near the so-called Ring of Fire in northern Ontario. EFN have been advocates of establishing a well-informed plan for regional growth that is centered on improving livelihoods across the north through open, respectful partnerships with the Crown and industry. However, there have been many divisive and harmful tactics pursued in the recent past that have had the effect of driving away industry and breaking trust with EFN and other First Nations.

“Trying to force your way north will never work. We’ve seen attempts at that over the past decade, and that’s what leads to conflict and the courts. Short sighted bulldozer policies have the same effect, so we need to think of a collaborative vision of the future from First Nations that is supported by Treaty partners. Corporate partners know they need our consent and support for projects, but it is often Crown governments who don’t see that or are unwilling to consider new and deeper partnerships. There are many ways we can work together for a sustainable future, and it comes down to respect. **Rather than Ontario or Canada re-writing laws to strip resources faster and lead to conflict on the land, the way forward is to co-develop laws and regulations that we could all live with. This can be done, and strategic changes would enable long term progress together.**

Are Canada and Ontario willing to act on the Treaty promise of sharing decisions and the shared management of our lands? That is the main question that will determine the social and economic sustainability of the north. Infrastructure, mines, forestry, and other initiatives are the subject of all kinds of speculation, but these things will likely move smoother and faster where there are respectful partnerships built on shared responsibility for our shared future. Things cannot be done as they have in the past. We must have a seat at the table,” stated Chief Atlookan and Council.

**Why is a ‘war council’ or other new approach necessary? It is clear that the key parties need to meet together in a respectful and open way. There is great urgency right now to hear and understand the needs and interests of core partners, including our neighbouring First Nations, governments and industry.** Aggressive cutting of ‘red tape’ sounds attractive to some on the campaign trail, but no one appears to want to sit down to identify the real issues and develop lasting solutions. That is the hard work of sustainable development that EFN members have recommended for some time.

Chief Atlookan and Council stated, “EFN has our own vision of energy self-sufficiency, community road access, and positive economic development. We need to bring those concepts together with others in our area, consider the big picture implications and options, and build a strong future. This is why we want to work at a trilateral table to explain the vision of our elders and secure the future our youth are depending on. We are eager to establish genuine partnerships but will not be sidelined by exploitive or divisive practices of the past.

Now that Canada has elected a leader and cabinet is being assembled, I am calling Prime Minister Carney and Premier Ford to get down to work – let's get together with your key Ministers to consider shared strategies to achieve a better shared future. We need to develop solutions together based on mutual respect and wisdom. Positive changes won't happen without these core elements of sustainability.”

For further comment, please contact the Chief and Council:

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