



Okanagan Indian Band

12420 Westside Road, Vernon, BC, V1H 2A4

Phone (250) 542-4328, Fax (250) 542-4990

For Immediate Release: August 17, 2009 - Recent press coverage concerning the altercation which occurred last week on the Okanagan Indian Reserve has left the citizens of the Okanagan with a misleading impression. This misleading coverage has needlessly damaged relations between the Okanagan Indian Band and our neighbours and inflamed racial tensions. The Okanagan Indian Band and its members live and work closely with our neighbours and provide numerous benefits to the Okanagan and its residents. For example, for years we have given Okanagan residents, their families and their friends access to Kin Beach for all to enjoy. We have done this for many years without seeking compensation or charging fees.

While there have been inflammatory and overstated comments made about our members not paying tax, the reality is that many of our members pay income and sales taxes in Kelowna, Vernon and other surrounding communities. The tax exemption protects one of our rights on the small piece on Okanagan Indian Band Reserves that has been set aside for us by the Crown. There are also substantial property taxes and other taxes paid to the surrounding communities by the various non-Okanagan Indigenous people who live in the communities that have been developed by our members over the years. Our members also spend many millions of dollars in the surrounding community every year buying goods and services, all of which helps to support local business and employment.

While the Okanagan Indian Band is committed to protecting its reserve lands and will take all lawful steps necessary to do so, we have also been committed to working closely with our neighbours to ensure that issues are dealt with in an orderly and fair manner. For example, the Okanagan Indian Band and Vernon are in an ongoing dispute over whether or not Lakeshore Road trespasses on the reserve (which is the private property of the Okanagan Indian Band). If it should be decided that the road must be closed because it trespasses, Okanagan Indian Band is committed to making sure that this is implemented in a way that does not suddenly or needlessly disrupt the lives of our neighbours.

Over the years we have suffered from the effects of racism, discrimination and violence directed at our people as we have been pushed off our lands onto the reserves. The press seems to have lost sight of the fact that the root of this dispute appears to have been a decision by a group of party goers to ignore a "Private Property" sign erected by one of our members on his private lands. All of us in the Okanagan Indian Band know the friction that is caused by ongoing use and disruption of private property by people who feel that they do not have to respect landowner's wishes and park and walk over lands that are not theirs. For us this is made worse by the fact that the police and civic authorities do not seem to take these complaints seriously on reserve lands. While it is unfortunate that this appears to have boiled over into a fight, we hope that the press can see that the real story here is the ongoing failure of people to respect the private property of the Okanagan Indian Band and its members and the failure of the police to act before these matters reach a boiling point.

The Okanagan Indian Band does not condone, support or encourage racism or the use of violence to settle matters. In return we expect that our neighbours will respect our reserves and our private property.

Chief Fabian Alexis, Okanagan Indian Band
(250) 542-4328