

Attention News/Assignment Editors

Experts on Aboriginal Culture and History to Testify at Start of Ipperwash Inquiry Next Week

TORONTO, July 7 /CNW/ - Two experts on aboriginal culture and history will be the first witnesses at the Ipperwash Inquiry that starts evidentiary hearings on Tuesday, July 13, 2004, in Forest, Ontario.

The Inquiry was established by the Government of Ontario to inquire into the fatal shooting of Dudley George during a protest by Aboriginal people at Ipperwash Provincial Park in 1995.

Under its terms of reference, the Inquiry is to report on the circumstances that led to the shooting and is also to make recommendations designed to avoid violence in similar circumstance in the future. The Honourable Sidney B. Linden is the Commissioner.

The witnesses during the first three days of hearings next Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday will be Darlene Johnston, B.A., LL.B., LL.M., an assistant professor of law at the University of Toronto, and Joan Holmes, B.A., M.A., president of Joan Holmes Associates Inc, an Aboriginal rights and research consulting firm.

Their presentations and the three days of hearings on August 17, 18 and 19 will set the context for the evidence to be heard later in the year about the 1995 protest and the subsequent events.

Professor Johnston is a specialist in Great Lakes Aboriginal history and is a descendant of the Great Lakes Aboriginal ancestors. She is also a member of the Inquiry's Research Advisory Committee. Her presentation will include an exposition of the significance of burial grounds in Aboriginal culture. A burial ground is one of the issues in the dispute that led to the 1995 protest. She will also examine the relationship of the lands in this region to the Great Lakes Aboriginal people in the 17th and early 18th century.

Ms. Holmes will trace the history of relations and land transactions between Great Lakes Aboriginal people and governments going back to the 18th century. Her presentation will include an examination of the land transactions between 1927 and 1928 in which the Kettle Point and Stony Point First Nation surrender land, the purchase of the Ipperwash Provincial Park by the province and the eviction of the First Nation from Stony Point reserve during the 2nd World War.

As part of that review, she will trace the requests for return of its former Stony Point reserve territory and governmental responses to such request, including requests made by the Honourable Jean Chretien when he was the Minister Responsible for Indian Affairs. The Department of National Defence used the War Measures Act to appropriate the former Stony Point Reserve in 1942. As well, Ms. Holmes will review the contemporary claims concerning the possible existence of burial grounds of both Ipperwash Provincial Park and the nearby Camp Ipperwash.

Ms. Homes and her firm have done extensive historical research for the federal government a number of provincial governments and Aboriginal groups.

"One of the purposes of a public inquiry is to educate the public on the matters in issue. An understanding by Ontarians of the Aboriginal history of the region and the historical context of the incident is

fundamental to the Inquiry and our educational mandate," says Lead Commission Counsel Derry Millar.

Commissioner Linden has separated the Inquiry into two phases that will run concurrently. Part I will deal with events surrounding the death of Dudley George. Part II will deal with the policy issues and recommendations directed to the avoidance of violence in similar circumstances.

As a component of Part II, the Inquiry co-sponsored with the Osgoode Hall Law School a symposium on police and government that was held in Toronto on June 29, 2004. Information about the symposium is available on the inquiry's web page at www.ipperwashinquiry.ca. More information about the inquiry is also available on the web page.

Next week's hearing will be held at the Forest Memorial community center (Kimball hall) at 6276 Townsend Line, Forest, Ontario. Forest is part of the Municipality of Lambton Shores. The first day's hearing will start at 10:30 a.m. and at 10 a.m. on the subsequent days. The schedule of further hearing days including the time and location, is posted on the Inquiry's website.

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