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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MONTREAL 000874

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TAGS: ASEC, PREL, PGOV, SNAR, PHUM, CA

SUBJECT: KANESATAKE GRAND CHIEF GABRIEL FRUSTRATED BY LAW

ENFORCEMENT INACTION

REF: A. A) MONTREAL 68

B. B) QUEBEC 80

Classified By: Bernadette Allen, Consul General, Montreal, State. Reas

on: 1.5(B)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Mohawk territory of Kanesatake has become a haven for marijuana cultivation, drug dealing, arms possession, and other organized criminal activity, ousted Grand Chief James Gabriel told Consulate representatives on June 17. Gabriel, who has not been able to return to Kanesatake since his home was burned to the ground in January, said that the specter of the 1990 Oka crisis and fear of deadly violence, have prevented the Surete du Quebec and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police from taking action.

END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Accompanied by aid Dean Dussault, Grand Chief James Gabriel spoke to Consulate officers for over an hour and a half about the trouble-plagued Kanesatake reserve, one of three Mohawk territories in the province of Quebec.

Kanesatake (population 1,400) located on the North shore of the Saint Lawrence river some 50 kilometers from Montreal, was the sight of the 1990 Oka crisis, in which opposition to the expansion of a golf course on Mohawk burial grounds led

to a summer-long stand-off between Mohawk warriors and SQ officers and Canadian Forces and resulted in the death of an SQ officer.

3. (C) Chief Gabriel said that the narcotics trade in Kanesatake took off in the mid-1990s. He noted that there had been an SQ intervention in 1995, led by then Quebec Public Security Minister Serge Menard, in which 20 to 30 acres and 100,000 marijuana plants were destroyed, yet no arrests were made. After the raids, marijuana cultivation moved inside, with as many as five underground bunkers constructed to house hydroponic grow-operations on the territory. Gabriel estimated that between five and seven hundred pounds of marijuana is smuggled off the territory each week, for export to the United States. Gabriel said that the drug traffic now also includes heroin and other hard drug sales. Gabriel believes that an investigation of the money trail would show that the local bank in Oka sued by Kanesatake residents, the XXXXXXXXXXXX, is awash in large American dollar deposits.

4. (C) Chief Gabriel identified the leaders of the narcotics trade as XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX (both of whom are related to James Gabriel) and said they are affiliated with the Hells' Angels biker gang, and to a lesser extent, Chinese and

Russian mafia groups. According to James Gabriel, Robert Gabriel, has never had a full-time job -- and his wife recently applied for welfare -- yet Robert lives in a home worth several hundred thousand dollars and drives expensive cars.

5. (C) Gabriel was first elected Kanesatake Grand Chief in 2001, though in effect he led a minority government as four of the seven Band Council members were "less than enthusiastic about law enforcement." However, in July 2003 elections, Gabriel gained a majority; he and three other Council members took a decision to bring the territory's ineffective police force "back up to par" and Gabriel began talking to the SQ and RCMP about support for action against the criminal elements that had taken root on the reserve. Gabriel said that plans to replace the police chief and bring in an outside aboriginal police unit were leaked, however, and the new force got "boxed in" at police headquarters on January 12, leading to the 30-hour blockade by masked, armed men surrounding the station (see Ref. A).

6. (C) Quebec Public Security Minister Jacques Chagnon's negotiation of a temporary fix -- which reinstated the old police chief and brought in Mohawk peacekeepers from the near-by Kahnawake reserve to serve as an interim police force

-- was mainly "an image-boosting" exercise, according to Gabriel. The peacekeepers did little to police the territory and ultimately left in March. There has been no real policing in Kanesatake since January, Gabriel said.

7. (C) The three chiefs on the Band Council who side with Gabriel, Chiefs Clarence Simon, Marie Chene and Doreen Canatonquin, remain in Kanesatake but are keeping low profiles because they face harassment by people loyal to the dissident chiefs and criminal gangs. Gabriel said that the dissident chiefs, John Harding, and Pearl and Steven Bonspile, periodically make appearances in the media, "wrapping themselves in the cloak of Mohawk sovereignty." Gabriel said that the whole Band Council never meets; when decisions have to be taken regarding the administration of the territory, Gabriel meets with Chiefs Simon, Chene and Contonquin at the hotel in Laval (about two kilometers from Kanesatake) where Gabriel has lived since January. The dissident chiefs have called for an election on July 14 to choose a new Grand Chief, claiming that James Gabriel has abandoned the territory. But James Gabriel says that there is no way a fair election, supervised by an impartial, outside monitoring organization, can be held in July. James Gabriel said that any election will have to be delayed; lawyers have advised him that the current Band Council could

remain in power for a few months beyond their mandate if conditions do not permit an election.

8. (C) Gabriel has been in continuous dialogue with the SQ and RCMP to reestablish a police force, but to date, police officers have only patrolled the highway surrounding Kanesatake, and not actually entered the territory. The SQ has been working with a Mohawk police force in preparation to re-enter the territory, but so far has held back entering Kanesatake, leading to much frustration on the Mohawks' part. Gabriel said that there has been friction recently between the Mohawk police and their SQ sponsors; cooperation has been threatened by a personnel dispute, and mistrust on both sides. At bottom, the Mohawk force would like to enter the territory and begin enforcing the law; the SQ feels the time is not right, and that violence would ensue if either or both the SQ and the Mohawk force were to go into Kanesatake.

9. (C) Though it is clear that Gabriel is in close contact with the Quebec government (which is putting him up in the Laval hotel), Gabriel expressed deep frustration over the unwillingness of either the Quebec or federal government to bring law and order to Kanesatake. Though the Oka crisis has been repeatedly raised by the Quebec media and government officials, Gabriel said the current situation is very

different from 1990, when the Kanesatake population and Mohawks from the other Quebec reserves supported the Mohawk warriors' stance. He said that the traditional Mohawk Warrior Society, which stood up during the Oka crisis, and "the group of thugs" calling itself warriors in Kanesatake today are different. Other First Nations tribes in Quebec have been supportive of Gabriel, citing their concern about the vulnerability of their own native communities to organized crime infiltration. Gabriel said that the only support that the dissident Chiefs have been able to summon is from professional activists like Jaggi Singh and Sean Brandt. And, contrary to claims made by SQ officials to the Quebec Consul General in May (see Ref B), Gabriel says there has been no influx of Mohawks from other reserves, in Canada or the United States.

10. (C) Gabriel is disheartened by the Quebec Security Minister Jacques Chagnon's repeated characterizations of the problem as a dispute between Mohawk factions that an election could resolve. He feels that Chagnon, supported by Quebec Premier Jean Charest, simply wants the Kanesatake situation to be "quiet," even if the drug trade and criminal activity flourish. But Gabriel said that young people on the territory -- who have few employment opportunities -- are influenced by the apparent affluence and lifestyles of the

drug dealers and criminals. He believes the criminal activity problems will only grow worse, as more community members are drawn into it.

11. (C) Gabriel also cited fears of people "taking the law into their own hands." He said that people on both sides of the conflict have arms in Kanesatake. According to (James) Gabriel, in addition to hunting weapons XXXXXXXXXXXX has explosives, assault weapons and rocket launchers. "Most of our community members can recognize the sound of an AK-47," Gabriel said. Gabriel and his aid Dussault both emphasized the difficulty for the "silent majority" in Kanesatake to speak out in their small community against criminals that everyone knows and sees often. But given the prevalence of weaponry on the territory, Gabriel said he is very afraid that "blood feuds" will surface."

12. (U) Grand Chief Gabriel gave an exclusive interview to the Journal de Montreal on the same day he visited the Consulate. During the course of the interview, he revealed something he had mentioned briefly to us: the fact that for the past year Kanesatake has been under the administrative supervision of the Ministry of Indian Affairs, assigned to a PricewaterhouseCoopers accountant working full-time from an office in Oka (situated next to the Kanesatake territory).

According to Gabriel, Kanesatake had racked up an accumulated deficit of C\$4 million by 2003. Ottawa had imposed financial supervision prior to Gabriel's attaining the majority on the Band Council that year, Gabriel emphasized.

13. (U) The tabloid Journal focused on the fact that part of the territory's deficit stemmed from mortgage payments made on individual Kanesatake homes -- including that of Robert Gabriel -- that the Ministry of Indian Affairs deducted from Kanesatake's budget. Apparently, the Ministry customarily co-signs mortgage loans for native applicants. According to what James Gabriel told Le Journal, when Robert Gabriel was unable to make payments on his \$185,000 mortgage, the Ministry of Indian Affairs paid the debt in full, subtracted the sum from the Band Council's budget, and transferred the property -- a large mansion with a pool -- to the Council's ownership. However, Robert Gabriel and his family continued to live there. Robert Gabriel, who has been accused of participating in the January 12 riot and blockade at the police station, is under court order currently to stay away from Kanesatake.

14. (C) Gabriel's story conforms to information gathered from law enforcement contacts of the Consulate. There is indeed great concern on the part of both the federal and

provincial police about the arms on the territory, and the deadly confrontations that could result if a full-scale raid were to be mounted and a new police unit installed. We understand that an RCMP force would be prepared to enter Kanesatake territory if "something blows" and violence occurs, but for now, both the SQ and the RCMP are holding back. The fate of James Gabriel and his Mohawk police force remains to be seen. He told us that he is concerned the Kanesatake situation will fade from the public eye if enforcement actions are not taken soon. But he was equally certain that the territory is a tinderbox, ready to explode.

ALLEN

=====CABLE ENDS=====