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For immediate release

TROOPS AT FORT SIMPSON WILL NOT BE WELCOMED

FORT SIMPSON, NT – April 13 -- When the Canadian army lands here Monday for an 11-day mission to “secure” the town’s airport from terrorists, it will not be welcomed by the Dehcho First Nations (DFN) whose territory surrounding the federal airport land is under their jurisdiction, not Canada’s.

“Operation Narwhal may be just a mock exercise to the Canadian forces, but we see it as interference with our land and rights. Indeed, I think it could be seen as an exercise of intimidation by Canada on the Dehcho,” Grand Chief Herb Norwegian said Friday.

“Canada has reneged on a promise to implement our Land Use Plan, and will not negotiate with us in good faith, but they seem to think Fort Simpson is a strategic hub for the Mackenzie Gas Pipeline. We have already informed Canada that the pipeline will not cross our land until we have our Land Use Plan approved.”

Operation Narwhal will station 40 military personnel at the airport from April 16-27 as part of what it calls “a sovereignty operation for Canadian forces.” Another 240 troops will be stationed for the same period at Norman Wells. The military says it considers these two sites as ‘possible terrorist sites’ because of their strategic location on the pipeline route.

In addition to “securing” the airport from potential terrorists, Joint Task Force North will be patrolling the area and guarding the airport, a military spokesperson confirmed.

Norwegian says he was not consulted.

The DFN is preparing to resume land claims negotiations with the Federal government later this month. The key issue before negotiators is the approval and implementation of the Dehcho Land Use Plan which was developed jointly by the DFN and Canada over the past five years.

“Implementing the land use plan is the key to unlocking the potential of our territory and securing a sustainable future for our children and all Canadians,” Norwegian said. “Canada has rejected this Plan, but without it there can be no pipeline across our territory,” he added.

Norwegian said the mock terrorist exercise shows gratuitous ignorance of the current situation in the Dehcho and that he would not be surprised “if some of our people greet the Canadian troops with less than a warm welcome. We have our own sovereignty over this land and do not intend to be intimidated by soldiers of a government using the threat of terrorism as an excuse to show their flag on our land.”

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For further information, please contact Herb Norwegian