

Tuesday May 16, 2023

NESKANTAGA CHIEF CHRISTOPHER MOONIAS ISSUES RESPONSE TO PREMIER DOUG FORD'S STATEMENT THAT HE WILL MOVE FORWARD WITH MINING THE RING OF FIRE DESPITE INDIGENOUS OPPOSITION

Premier Doug Ford has signalled his intent to trample Indigenous rights, saying at a May 11, 2023 press conference that he would move forward with mining in the Ring of Fire despite opposition from First Nations like Neskantaga.

The Ring of Fire lies within our homelands. The Northern Road Link, which would connect the Ring of Fire to southern Ontario, would pass over the Attawapiskat River, the lifeblood of our community. We have travelled and cared for this land since time immemorial – along the river's banks lie the burial sites of our ancestors and our sacred places for ceremony, and its waters are home to lake sturgeon, an endangered species that is a key part of Anishinaabe culture. We have Aboriginal, Treaty, and inherent rights to our traditional territories, which must be respected.

Ford has done little to engage the First Nations near the Ring of Fire in a meaningful negotiation or consultation process. This has included introducing Bill 71, the *Building More Mines Act*, which would fast-track development in our territories, without consulting affected First Nations.

The Premier seems to be misinformed about a number of facts, so we'll clarify for him:

First, when asked by a journalist if there is "any possibility that the government will rethink the Ring of Fire, given the Indigenous opposition," Ford responded that "we're building that Ring of Fire, sure as I'm talking to you." Canada has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which means that states must obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before making decisions that will affect them or their territories. Neskantaga has inherent and



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Treaty rights to our lands, and we have the right to provide or withhold our consent. No road will cross our river, and no ore will be mined, over our objections.

Second, the Premier said that only “a few” First Nations oppose mining in the Ring of Fire. In fact, out of the nine Matawa First Nations – whose territories are closest to the Ring of Fire, and who have Treaty rights in the area – only two have come out in favour of the mining, and these are the road proponent communities.

Ford’s government has adopted a “divide and conquer” strategy, undermining the unity of the Matawa First Nations by offering backroom deals to some. Asked at last week’s press conference about what he would do if Neskantaga blocked construction of a road across the Attawapiskat River, Ford replied that he expects other First Nations to support the government in its violation of Neskantaga’s rights.

We will not be divided by these colonial tactics to fracture our relations, our lands, and our authority. We will continue to protect our homelands, our waters, and our communities.

We ask again that Ontario commit to upholding the standard of free, prior, and informed consent, and respecting our laws and protocols that apply on our lands.

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***For more information, please contact Kelvin Moonias, Councillor, Neskantaga First Nation:
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