



NEWS RELEASE

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GTC STANDS WITH THE SIPEKNE'KATIK FIRST NATION

The Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC) supports the right of Indigenous groups such as the Sipekne'katik First Nation to exercise their inherent and constitutionally protected rights. Our Nation stands in solidarity with the Sipekne'katik First Nation in their efforts to implement their fishing rights.

The Mi'kmaq people have been living and harvesting in what is currently eastern Canada for thousands of years. They have made many agreements with colonial settlers including the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1752, which was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1985. This treaty explicitly states that the Mi'kmaq "...shall not be hindered from, but have free liberty of Hunting & Fishing as usual."¹ In the Supreme Court of Canada case of *R v. Marshall, 1999*, the right of Mi'kmaq to harvest in the effort to earn a "moderate livelihood" was upheld.² This right is also protected by s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.³

As a treaty holder, the GTC understands the significance of such agreements and constitutionally protected rights for our people and ways of life. Recently elected GTC Grand Chief Ken Smith states that "like many Canadians, the Gwich'in people are appalled at the recent events in Saulnierville, Nova Scotia involving the Sipekne'katik First Nation. The complete lack of respect for Indigenous rights and cultural practices being expressed by members of the commercial lobster fishery and local residents of the area, is very concerning".

Grand Chief Smith also states that "the Gwich'in Tribal Council believes that any interference with the exercising of these rights by the Sipekne'katik First Nation is not only completely unacceptable, but is also immoral and an infringement of their human rights. We hope that the parties involved can find a resolution in the near future that respects the rights of the Sipekne'katik as well as promotes greater understanding of these rights within the larger community in Eastern Canada. This is an opportunity for us to achieve the reconciliation that Canada desires and so desperately requires".

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¹ <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028593/1539609242434>

² <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1739/index.do>

³ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-16.html#h-52>