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Kahnawake and Six Nations Exercising Inherent Right to Participate in Tobacco Trade

(Ohsweken, On. and Kahnawake, Qc. – April 6, 2016) The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke and the Elected Council of Six Nations of the Grand River have collaborated to release the following information, setting the record straight on false statements recently issued by the Sûreté du Québec.

As First Nations, Kahnawà:ke and Six Nations have the legal right to produce, distribute, and trade tobacco. Any attempt to regulate or restrict a First Nation from manufacturing and participating in inter-Nation trade within the tobacco industry is an attack on this inherent Indigenous right.

“Tobacco is our natural product,” said Kahnawà:ke Grand Chief Joseph Tokwiwo Norton. “We’ve used it for centuries. We use it for ceremonies and, when the Europeans came, we later used it for trade. They took the product, made it ‘their own’ and – all of a sudden – it’s illegal.”

Operations, like the recent MYGALE project, often lump the legal manufacturing and trade of tobacco by Indigenous people with organized crime activities. This is not only incorrect, but highly misleading.

Both Kahnawà:ke and Six Nations have deemed organized crime, and criminal activities to be illegal within their Territories. Both Iroquois communities cooperate with neighbouring law enforcement bodies on investigations relating to illegal activities occurring within their Nations and/or involving their community members. **Tobacco is not an illegal activity.**

“It’s disheartening to read statements, like the one recently issued in the MYGALE project, attempting to criminalize our tobacco industry,” said Six Nations Chief Ava Hill. “Tobacco is a historical trade that supports the growth and economic prosperity of our communities. As sovereign Nations, the federal and provincial governments have no jurisdictional right to tax and regulate tobacco on our Territories.”

For video statements, click on the following link: <http://youtu.be/EGrSE4O53AQ>

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