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NESKANTAGA TO CARNEY AND FORD: YOU CANNOT BUY YOUR WAY PAST OUR CONSENT

Federal funding for Ring of Fire roads attacks Indigenous jurisdiction and makes a mockery of the regional assessment

Neskantaga First Nation condemns Prime Minister Mark Carney and Premier Doug Ford's October 21 announcement committing up to $1 billion in federal funding over three years, matching Ontario's initial investment, to advance roads serving Ring of Fire mining development.

Canada and Ontario know that Neskantaga has not consented to this development on our lands and waters. They are proceeding with funding and political commitments anyway. They make a mockery of every so-called consultation or "Nation-to-Nation" discussion they have ever had with our First Nation. Our consent means nothing to Canada and it means nothing to Ontario. **To Carney and Ford, our treaty rights, our inherent rights, our human rights are nothing but red-tape holding back shareholder riches and a political legacy they cannot see is stained with blood.**

To Carney and Ford, if you cannot hear us now, you will hear us when we meet you face-to-face on the land: announcing a billion dollars does not give either government permission to cross our territory, endanger our river, or decide our future.

We are a Nation and a Treaty No. 9 rights holder. Our lands are our homeland. Our river sustains our people, our responsibilities, and our way of life. Neither a funding announcement nor an agreement between the Prime Minister and Premier can erase our jurisdiction. So long as we are living on the Attawapiskat River, no other government, company, or First Nation can give our consent on our behalf.

This announcement is a slap in the face to the First Nations that have devoted time, knowledge, and their already scarce resources to the Ring of Fire regional assessment. Canada presented this process as an opportunity to examine the consequences of potential development and inform future decisions. Now its political leaders are committing public money to the roads that would enable that development and presenting the Ring of Fire as a done deal.

What are we being asked to assess if the government has already decided the outcome? Why ask our people to participate if our refusal changes nothing?

This announcement is a betrayal of that good-faith work. It tells our people that Canada will sit across the assessment table asking for our knowledge and time while standing beside Ontario promising investors that development will proceed. Our participation in the regional assessment is not consent to roads or mines and let the record show that it must never be presented as an endorsement of either. Engagement must include the possibility that a Nation says no—and that its answer is respected.

This is colonialism as it has always been in this country: the Crown decides how Indigenous lands will be used, pours its wealth and resources into making that resource extraction happen, then expects Indigenous peoples to accept their fate. To our Anishinaabe people, calling it "economic security" or "nation-building" is little more than propaganda from an ecocidal and genocidal state that pours billions into resource extraction while denying our people the basic human right to clean drinking water for over three decades.

Has Carney forgotten that we have the longest boil water advisory in Canadian history? His government rations our people 1.5 liters of bottled water per day to cook, clean, bathe, and drink with. We are given one liter a day per child. Imagine living under these genocidal conditions and then being asked to support one billion dollars being spent to destroy your home. Imagine staying silent. Neskantaga refuses.

We reject the attempt to turn our homeland into an industrial corridor through financial commitments and political pressure. Our rights do not expire when governments announce a construction timetable. Our responsibilities to our lands, waters, ancestors, and future generations cannot be bought.

Neskantaga demands that Canada and Ontario withdraw this commitment to advance Ring of Fire roads without the consent of affected Nations; stop treating our participation in assessment and consultation as permission to proceed; and publicly affirm that no road or associated mining development will be imposed on Neskantaga's territory without our free, prior, and informed consent.

To investors and companies watching this announcement: government funding is not Neskantaga's authorization. They are misleading you with political promises of certainty on our lands. We will be there to meet you when you try to enter our homelands without our consent.

As people prepare to join in a national call to action and demonstration in Ottawa next week during the First Nations-First Ministers' Meeting, our message to Carney and Ford is unequivocal: we will defend our lands, our river, and our future. We will not be pressured into surrendering our jurisdiction to satisfy your investment timetable.

No consent. No Ring of Fire.

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