

PRESS RELEASE STATEMENT

Thursday, October, 3rd 2002
University of Victoria - MacLaurin Building D114

Re: Anti-Terrorist Unit Uses Excessive Force On Indigenous Family

At 6:00 am Saturday, September, 21st 2002, members of the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) raided the residence of Nitanis Desjarlais and John Rampanen in Port Alberni, British Columbia. With the assistance of the RCMP Emergency Response Team, local RCMP, ambulance, and fire departments, a warrant to search for unauthorized firearms was executed. INSET is an investigative anti-terrorist unit stemming from last years 9/11 attacks.

This police raid was conducted as a follow-up to allegations that Mr. Rampanen was "stockpiling arms". The quiet neighborhood of Mr. Rampanen and his common-law wife Ms. Desjarlais, located on the outskirts of Port Alberni, was evacuated during the early hours of September 21st, as a safety precaution during the police raid. Fortunately, Mr. Rampanen and Ms. Desjarlais along with their twelve year old son, two year old daughter and new-born son were not present in their home during the time of incursion.

At 9:45 am on the same day, members of INSET along with local RCMP officers, visited the residence of Mr. Rampanens' parents, also located in Port Alberni. Upon arrival, INSET officers became aware of the presence of Ms. Desjarlais and Mr. Rampanen and immediately began questioning Ms. Desjarlais. Ms. Desjarlais was taken outside of the house and asked if she knew that John Rampanen was involved in Native Issues. She replied that she did and that she herself was involved and sarcastically asked if it was a crime to be involved in Native Issues, to no reply from INSET. Approximately 10 minutes into the questioning, the inquiring INSET officer received a telephone call reporting that the searched residence was "clear". At which point Ms. Desjarlais was informed by an INSET member that "it would be a shame for (her) children to grow up without parents".

At this point, INSET officers approached Mr. Rampanen and informed him of the execution of a search warrant on his residence. They further informed him that allegations were made that he was "stockpiling arms" and that they did not know the identity of the person or persons behind the "malicious allegation". They included that there was considerable damage inflicted upon the front entrance to the house and that any damages incurred would be covered by the RCMP. Mr. Rampanen was reminded of the "concern that he should have towards the safety of (his) children" and that if he was in possession of any unauthorized firearms that he would be given the opportunity to surrender them without repercussions. Mr. Rampanen replied that he does not possess any firearms, that his house and all of his belongings had already been thoroughly searched, and that that should be sufficient evidence that he was not "stockpiling arms".

When asked if this sort of action was to be expected every time a malicious allegation was made in regards to Mr. Rampanen, INSET replied that, “after today’s actions, we would have to say yes”. Mr. Rampanen stated that “it was because of (his) concern for the safety of (his) children that he was not involved in activities such as stockpiling weapons”, and further, suggested that there are more civilized methods that could be applied when dealing with these types of concerns.

Mr. Rampanen and Ms. Desjarlais have been actively involved in Indigenous issues for a number of years through organizations such as; the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, United Native Nations, Native Youth Movement, Indigenous Sovereignty Network, and the Westcoast Warrior Society. Mr. Rampanen has also been actively involved in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs directed towards Indigenous youth, as well as, educational and informational workshops throughout Indigenous communities. Ms. Desjarlais is an emerging videographer and specializes in documentaries focusing on concerns and issues arising from various Indigenous Nations. The young couple have just recently moved to Vancouver Island where they plan on raising their children.

Later, during the evening of the same day and the morning of Sunday, September 22nd, other members of the Westcoast Warrior Society and their families were also approached by INSET officers. Similar remarks regarding the safety and concern of their children, and suggestive statements regarding firearms were also expressed during these visits.

After incidents arising from the weekend of September 21st, Mr. Rampanen and Ms. Desjarlais are still trying to ensure that these types of aggressive actions are not wrongfully exercised upon those involved within matters relating to Indigenous rights. They feel that these sorts of unnecessary tactics only contribute negatively towards the already fragile relationship between Indigenous Nations and the Government of Canada. Needless to say, Mr. Rampanen and family are very startled by this raid and are still struggling to regain a sense of safety and security within their own home. This incident has been very difficult on them, but they are encouraged and strengthened by the overwhelming amount of support that they have received from their friends and family throughout the Indigenous community.