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CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

WHILE ONTARIO CONTINUES TO IGNORE ITS DUTY TO CONSULT, PIC RIVER FIRST NATION IS DEALING WITH ANOTHER TOXIC SPILL

December 9, 2009 – Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse was very concerned to learn of a spill of 12000 litres of toxic industrial chemicals on Pic River First Nation’s traditional territory. Pic River First Nation (PRFN) asserts Aboriginal/Treaty Rights over its traditional territory and this claim is presently before the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

Despite efforts by PRFN to engage the Ontario government in a consultation and accommodation agreement, the Ministry of the Environment refused to consult with PRFN in coming to its last minute, back-room settlement with Tembec that authorizes Tembec to discharge millions of litres of toxic black and green liquor into the spill basin at Marathon Pulp Inc. The Ministry’s decision gave rise to the weekend spill and they must be held accountable.

“It is inexcusable for the Crown to have failed to consult Pic River First Nation at all in this mill closing. We have been supporting Pic River First Nation in their efforts to seek a consultation agreement that addresses comprehensively their lands and resources rights in their claim territory since 2007. Now more than ever, it is time for the Crown in Right of Ontario to give serious consideration to PRFN’s reasoned proposal for consultation” stated Regional Chief Angus Toulouse.

Chief Roy Michano of PRFN is furious with the Ministry of the Environment’s refusal to take the time to consult with PRFN. They made this request of the Ministry of Environment at a hearing before its Environmental Review Tribunal. “Pic River knew there were risks and we tried to stop it,” said Chief Michano. He further stated that “cyanide was dumped in our water twenty years ago and our members were forced to drink bottled water. We will not stand for that again.”

Although the Ministry of the Environment has attempted to downplay the impact of the spill, it has yet to release any scientific data to PRFN as assurance that no harm is pending.

The Chiefs of Ontario join Pic River First Nation in calling on the Ontario Crown to take immediate steps to engage PRFN in a comprehensive and systematic consultation and accommodation framework, to prevent the Crown from further ignoring its legal duties to Pic River First Nation.

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