

## Media Release

Wed. April 7, 2010

# Hundreds to march with Grassy Narrows

Wild River flows up University Ave. to deliver mercury demands to Queen's Park

Toronto - Today, on World Health Day, 40 Grassy Narrows First Nation members will lead a march of hundreds to the seat of the Provincial Government at Queen's Park. The Grassy Narrows people have travelled 1,800 km to deliver their demands for restitution for mercury poisoning whose health effects in the community are worse now than when Ontario first banned fishing in their river 40 years ago, according to a newly translated study by Japanese mercury expert Dr. Harada. Far from dealing justly with Grassy Narrows, the Provincial government has compounded the impacts of mercury on the community's health, culture, and economy by permitting decades of unwanted clearcut logging, and mining activity on their territory.

### **VISUAL: RIVER RUN CREATIVE MARCH AND RALLY. April 7, Noon.**

**What:** Hundreds of Grassy Narrows members, and their supporters, will deploy 15,000 square feet of blue fabric to create a wild river that will flow up University Ave. to Queen's Park to deliver their demands, accompanied by traditional and samba drum groups, and by activists wearing animal costumes and large colourful fish puppets. Large banners read "clean water = our survival," and "Native rights now!"

**Where:** Noon. Grange Park (behind the AGO on Beverly South of Dundas).

**Destination:** Arriving at Queen's Park around 1 p.m. for speeches and demands.

**Shots:** Grassy Narrows women and youth lead the march up through Queen's Park to the Parliament accompanied by a huge river of supporters with massive blue fabric rippling in the wind. Aerial shots available from public buildings on University Avenue (UofT lounges at College, Hospitals).

**Speakers:** Grassy Narrows mothers, Grassy Narrows Chief Fobister, Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse, Bruce Cox (Greenpeace ED), Craig Benjamin (Amnesty), Joanne Webb (CUPE), Meera Karunanathan (Council of Canadians), Carly Joynt (SYC), Margaret Soumadh (CPT), Alex Hundert (AW@L), Mohan Mishra (NOII), and more.

**High resolution photos will be available at [FreeGrassy.org](http://FreeGrassy.org)**

### **Grassy Narrows demands to all levels of government:**

1. Governments must come to the table to make things right about the mercury;
2. Acknowledge mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows, strengthen Health Canada mercury safety guideline to protect all people;
3. Permanent monitoring through funding for Grassy Narrows run environmental health center, training for youth;

4. Stop the mills from polluting the water and air. Protect all rivers, lakes, and water sources.
5. Restore Grassy Narrows control over Grassy Narrows Territory. End the clearcutting forever.

Grassy Narrows' events in Toronto are supported by a network of over 30 organizations including the Council of Canadians, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Sierra Youth Coalition, AW@L, and Earthroots, as well as many independent grassroots activists.

## **CONTACTS:**

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## **Supporting Statements**

"How can we have trust, and reconciliation when the government of Ontario walks away from their responsibility to make things right about the mercury pollution they permitted," asked **Grassy Narrows Chief Simon Fobister**. "Our grassroots people are still suffering the affects on their health and livelihood from this poison in the water. It is no wonder they are out there on the blockades. The province needs to come back to the table to resolve the mercury issue."

"It is heartbreaking to hear the stories from the community members whose health has been affected by the mercury poisoning," **Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse** said. "The people of Grassy Narrows have raised their concerns for forty years now, only to have these concerns fall on deaf ears. The health of these people, the waters, the lands and all the beings are too important to be ignored. It is time for the government to listen to the voices of First Nations and to their constituents."

"The Province must come back to the table to finally make things right about mercury," explained **Judy Da Silva, a grassroots mother and blockader from Grassy Narrows**. "We must

stop the mills from destroying our forests, our water, and our culture for the survival of all people. The forests and waters of Grassy Narrows must be placed under the protection of our own people so that we can heal, and recover what we have lost for our children.”

“When I was pregnant I couldn’t afford to buy food at the store, so I ate what my grandfather brought home – mostly fish,” explained **Sherry Fobister, a young Grassy Narrows mother**. “Now both my children are sick with strange illnesses, just like their cousins. I myself have tremors and numbness, but I don’t qualify for compensation. Sometimes I can’t afford to bring my kids to Winnipeg for treatment. I want everyone in Grassy Narrows tested.”

“The tragedy at Grassy Narrows will be repeated unless we recognize that access to clean water is a human right,” said **Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians**. “There is a world-wide scarcity of water now, even in Canada there is massive pressure to turn water into a commodity to be bought and sold and controlled by corporate interests. I call on the McGuinty government to learn from the people of Grassy Narrows and protect the water for future generations.”

“Ontario has compounded the damage the mercury has done to Grassy Narrows by trying to force clear-cut logging and mining on the community,” said **David Sone of Earthroots**. Control over Grassy Narrows territory must be returned to Grassy Narrows people, and McGuinty needs to act now to prove he is serious about protecting the forests, lakes, and river that provide clean water and air for all of us.”

“The people of Grassy Narrows have faced decades of exploitation of their traditional lands, waters, and resources at great cost to their health and livelihoods,” said **Freya Putt, Forest Campaigner at Greenpeace Canada**. “It is past time that the Ontario government recognized the rights of the Grassy Narrows First Nation and other First Nations to determine how and when their lands and resources are used.”

“There was a time when ‘as long as the rivers flow’ meant forever to First Nations people,” said **CUPE Aboriginal Council Co-chairs Joanne Webb & Vince Musson**. “Today flowing rivers do not mean forever. Our water can no longer guarantee life for people or ecosystems. Today we must stand together to protect the water that all living things depend on.

The members of the CUPE Ontario Aboriginal Council believe that nature is being transformed by corporate agendas and the impact on First Nations people is profound. Nowhere is this more evident than for the Grassy Narrows Asubpeeschoseewagong Anishinabek.

Forty years after the Wabigoon River was contaminated with mercury the rivers are still flowing, but for the people of Grassy Narrows the waters are no longer life giving, they are toxic.”

"As Chief in the 1970's, when the government first negotiated with us, I said that Grassy Narrows requires the control over our land and resources for our people to recover from the devastating impacts of mercury pollution on our health, our culture, and our economy. This is still true," said **Grassy Narrows Chief Simon Fobister**.

**Grassy Narrows' Campaign is Endorsed by:**

Amnesty, Aw@l, Council of Canadians, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Federation of Students Ontario, Canadian Friends Service Committee, CESAR, Christian Peacemaker Teams Inc., Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE Local 1281, CUPE Local 2191 and CUPE Local 3097, Earthroots, Earth Justice Initiative, ForestEthics, Greenpeace, Greenspiration, Indigenous Environmental Network, ISW/Circle of Support, Louis Riel Bolivarian Circle/ Hands Off Venezuela, No One is Illegal Toronto, OCAP, Polaris, RAN, RANT, Roots and Shoots, Ryerson Students' Union, Sierra Club of Canada, Sierra Youth Coalition, Student Christian Movement, Toronto Bolivia Solidarity, University of Toronto Students' Union, York Federation of Students.