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Innu vow fight over eviction, but discard threats to burn cabins

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A leading Quebec Innu activist backtracked yesterday from threats he made to burn down cabins in Labrador if the Newfoundland and Labrador government enforces eviction orders sent out last week.

But Armand MacKenzie, a longtime lawyer for the Innu, maintained his people have rights on the land and won't hesitate to challenge the eviction notice in court.

The provincial government posted the notices from May 26 to May 30 on 60 cabins located near Nairn Bay in western Labrador.

A number of those cabins belong to Quebec Innu who live across the border from Labrador in Schefferville and Sept-Îles.

"We, as a department, became aware there were cabins illegally occupying crown land, so once we became aware of that, as we would in any part of the province ... we went out and posted (removal notices on) them," Newfoundland Minister of Environment Charlene Johnson said yesterday.

MacKenzie himself received a notice, as well as other members of his family including his elderly parents.

He said he was deeply upset when he told media on Thursday that Labrador cabin owners could see their properties go up in flames if the Quebec Innu are forced off the land. "It's going to be Labrador burning," he said then.

"I made those unfortunate comments in the heat of the moment," MacKenzie said. "I want to say that I condemn violence in any shape and form.

"To hear someone say we are strangers in our homeland, that we are not welcome in Labrador, it really hurts me," added MacKenzie, who said he is very much attached to the land where he said he was born.

Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams told St. John's media the cabins were erected recently, and he speculated they may be there to bolster Innu claims to land in the area, which would be affected if the Lower Churchill River hydro power project goes ahead.

MacKenzie maintained the cabins were built years ago and support the traditional hunting of many Innu with ancestral ties to Labrador soil. He said they hold ceremonies and bury their relatives on the land.

"The Innu were there well before the Labrador and Newfoundland border was marked out," he said.

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