

*Christian Peacemaker Teams
Esgenoopetitj (Burnt Church), New Brunswick
(506) 779-5886 cptcan@sympatico.ca
Toronto Office: (416) 421-7079*

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: William
Payne or Robert Holmes
March 10, 2001
(506) 779-5886*

CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKERS ON TRIAL FOR DEFENDING MI'KMAQ FISHING RIGHTS

At 9:30 am on Monday, March 12, at the Courthouse in Miramichi, two members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), William Payne (37) and Father Robert Holmes (64) will go on trial on the charge of "obstructing a fishery officer who was carrying out his duties according to the Fisheries Act."

On May 6, 2000 Payne and Holmes boarded a DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans) boat as it was being taken out of the water on a trailer at Neguac, NB. They were attempting to reclaim 10 lobster traps which had been confiscated from a Mi'kmaq fisher's boat an hour earlier near the Burnt Church Wharf.

The traps had official Mi'kmaq tags issued by the Mi'kmaq Fish and Wildlife commission and distributed according to the Management Plan of the Esgenoopetiji Aboriginal Community. The Esgenoopetiji First Nation has steadfastly refused to sign an agreement with the DFO preferring to exercise their inherent and Treaty Rights to regulate their own fishery.

CPT maintained a team in Esgenoopetiji during the

2000 fishing season with the purpose of reducing violence and in this case interfering with the structural violence of the Government of Canada as it sought to ignore and negate the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights of the Mi'kmaq first nation.

"It is time that Christians of European heritage in Canada take action to ensure that their government respects the treaties that have been signed with the first nations," says Payne.

Payne and Holmes have pleaded not guilty to the charge of obstruction and in fact consider the fishery officers guilty of obstructing the Mi'kmaq fishers from exercising their legal fishing rights.