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Media Release

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Iroquois Passport Controversy Challenges Tribal Sovereignty

Washington, D.C. – July 29, 2010 – A dispute involving the rights of the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Nations to issue their own passports generated media attention on the sovereign rights of Tribal Nations. Members of the Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse team, currently ranked fourth in the world, were denied travel to Manchester, England to compete in the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships. The team was informed that without a U.S. or Canadian issued passport, they would be forced to forfeit their participation in the Championship.

Last week member tribes of the National Indian Gaming Association came to Washington, D.C. for the annual Summer Legislative Summit. During opening remarks, Chairman Ernie Stevens Jr., acknowledged this heart breaking incident by saying “This is a tremendous set back for Indian country. Both the British and the United States of America failed to give the appropriate recognition to our Indian people who have been playing this sport long before it was a popular sport internationally.”

The team, members of the six Iroquois Confederacy nations – the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora, encountered numerous obstacles as the State Department claimed the passports lacked “security features.” Nonetheless, that did not prohibit the U.S. government from issuing the team a one-time waiver. Although it appeared as if the team was well on their way, the Canadian and British governments did not honor the U.S. waiver or the Tribal passports and prevented the team from participating in a game that their ancestors invented.

As team members were preparing to depart on July 11th, the British government stated that they would not recognize the Iroquois Confederacy passports. They continued to seek U.S. assistance as they requested written documentation stating the delegates

would be allowed to return home. The U.S. government failed to respond in a timely fashion. Ultimately, these unfortunate incidents prohibited the team from traveling to England and their games will be forfeited.

This controversy weighs heavily on the minds of Indian people nationwide. Lacrosse is a game initiated by our *own* people and it serves as a centerpiece of many Native American Tribes. This unfortunate occurrence is disrespectful of tribal sovereignty and the rights of Indian people. Considering we were denied the use of our own passports and therefore denied presence at a world championship tournament for a game we invented, it removes some of the legitimacy of the tournament.

Chairman Stevens said, “Lacrosse is a time honored tradition and we will continue to support these athletes as they represent the culture and traditions of our Indian people. Despite the circumstances of this situation, the issue of international recognition of our tribal governments will continue to come to the forefront. This is another opportunity and stepping stone towards securing our rights as Indian people and Sovereign Nations.”

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About the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA)

The National Indian Gaming Association is a nonprofit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other nonvoting associate member. The mission of NIGA is to advance the lives of Indian people – economically, socially and politically. NIGA operates as a clearinghouse and educational legislative and public policy resources for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development. For more information, visit www.indiangaming.org.