Media Contact: Department of Justice
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The following statement was issued today by Ralph E. Erickson, Special Assistant to the Attorney General:

I returned to Washington late last night expressly to give a first-hand report to officials of the Department of Interior on the current situation at Wounded Knee. A meeting was held this morning at the Department of Justice. In attendance were John C. Whitaker, Under Secretary of the Interior, Marvin L. Franklin, Assistant to the Secretary for Indian Affairs, and William Rogers, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Public Land Management, in addition to representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other offices in the Department of Justice. Secretary Morton has been fully briefed.

The briefing included details of Department of Justice operations at Wounded Knee. But, I also identified for Interior officials what I think to be some major problems for their consideration, particularly, local law enforcement capabilities and government on Indian reservations such as Pine Ridge.

On Wednesday, March 7, 1973, I issued a statement in which I said the Justice Department and the Interior Department had come as far as we could in negotiations with those who unlawfully occupy Wounded Knee. I also extended our offer of free passage for nonresident Indians through road blocks without fear of arrest. Approximately 42 women and children who live in Wounded Knee left yesterday in response to my request. Several more left the village today.

But AIM leaders continue to defy our repeated requests to leave Wounded Knee so that order can be restored.

Under the circumstances, the offer I made Sunday, March 4 -- five full days ago -- is terminated as of this moment. Hereafter, any non-residents attempting to leave under any circumstances will be subject to immediate arrest on federal charges.

As I said before, evidence concerning the violations of federal law which took place and subsequent violations will be presented to a grand jury which will convene on Monday, March 12, 1973.

We will make every effort to arrive at a peaceful conclusion to this matter. But, we must enforce the law, and that we will do.

In response to my statement, further negotiations have been initiated by the attorneys for residents of the Wounded Knee district.

These negotiations have resulted in a request that Marvin Franklin agree to listen to the grievances of the Wounded Knee district residents in Pine Ridge within 24 hours of the peaceful departure of the non-residents in the Wounded Knee area. Mr. Franklin has agreed to meet with the residents according to the condition stated above.

I call upon the non-residents in Wounded Knee, especially the AIM leaders, to come to their senses, to

think of the innocent people involved and lay down their arms and come out during daylight hours. They will be arrested but no one will be hurt.
