Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Because of increasing reports of violence and the alleged breakdown of law and order on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Morris Thompson, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, today said he was taking several steps to alleviate the situation there and to help the Oglala Sioux Tribe find solutions to the causes which are disrupting the quality of life on the reservation.

Thompson said he was detailing a Bureau of Indian Affairs Special Officer and an assistant, along with 10, members of the Special Operations Service, to Pine Ridge immediately.

He said these men, who are among the most qualified and experienced in the Bureau, will work closely with local BIA law enforcement personnel there. He also said he was asking the Justice Department to assign additional judicial and staff personnel to Pine Ridge. These people would work on eliminating the current backlog of cases pending in the Federal court system.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs also will make available additional funds to the tribal court system to allow the hiring of additional judges, clerks and bailiffs to speed the judicial process in the tribal courts, Thompson said.

The Commissioner was hopeful he would be able to add additional permanent, qualified law enforcement officers, to the force at Pine Ridge and other areas.

Last year the Bureau completed a comprehensive study of law enforcement and detention needs throughout the BIA, he said, and the recommendations in the study would go far in solving problems such as those which exist at Pine Ridge today.

Among the recommendations are the hiring of additional, well trained officers, upgrading and renovation of detention centers and jails on reservations, and a general upgrading to the tribal court systems.

Thompson emphasized, however, that while the temporary assignment of additional enforcement and judicial personnel to Pine Ridge will alleviate the situation on a short-term basis, permanent long range solutions must be found, not only in law enforcement, but also in the other matters which are affecting the quality of life on the reservation.

To accomplish this goal Secretary of Interior, Rogers C.B. Morton, on Thompson's recommendation, has appointed a six member commission from key offices within the Interior Department including the BIA. They will look at law enforcement and tribal functions, the development of policies, programs and services to meet the needs of the reservation communities and individuals and communications on or near the reservation.

And Thompson said while at Pine Ridge the commission will work closely with the tribal government, staff, Indian community leaders and individuals. The Commissioner will go to Pine Ridge Thursday to meet with the Commission and tribal leaders.

Thompson said his actions today should in no way be thought of as a "takeover" of the Pine Ridge reservation or its tribal government. Rather, he said, they should be viewed as a positive action by both the Bureau and the tribe to find the best possible solutions to the problems which exist there.
