Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior Assistant Secretary Forrest Gerard announced today that: he is initiating action to help the Oneida Indians of New York resolve internal governmental problems.

Since 1975 the tribe has had no recognized governing body to handle tribal affairs, including negotiations of two large tribal land claims in the state. They had previously functioned under a consensus form of leadership.

Gerard has previously appealed to competing leadership groups to resolve their differences. In January he invited the various leaders; to meet with him to negotiate an internal compromise but only one of the competing groups attended the meeting. Other efforts to have general membership meetings in New York also failed.

Gerard said that his first step toward resolving the governmental impasse would be to complete and certify a roll of tribal members. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Gerard said, has assigned a specialist to complete this task as expeditiously as possible.

This roll would be used to identify persons eligible for BIA services and any settlements from the current claims. It would also establish the eligible participants for choosing a governing system for the tribe.

Gerard said that the Federal Government deeply respects the tribe's right to manage its internal affairs, He added, however, that "as trustee for the Oneidas I have concluded that the importance of the current land claims demands that I involve myself and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in attempting to bring about an equitable solution." I will continue to work with the Oneida people to achieve a working government for the tribe.