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## Time for a reality check on Caledonia

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Ontario's government was quite pleased with itself after last week's court ruling on the 10-month standoff in Caledonia.

The Ontario Court of Appeal overturned an earlier decision which had ruled the native occupation of a former proposed housing development was illegal and that negotiations with the protestors should cease until the site was vacated.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Ramsay called the ruling a "vindication" of the province's approach to the occupation.

Perhaps Ramsay should venture outside the stone walls of Queen's Park and have a look at what is happening on the ground in Caledonia.

This past weekend was another ugly one. A Richmond Hill man protesting the protest was arrested – but not charged – for his attempts to muster a rally. A house neighbouring the disputed site was ransacked early Sunday morning, with personal property damaged and remarks such as "Racist go home" spray-painted on the walls.

Natives are protesting the detention of Trevor Miller, whom they call a "political prisoner." Miller was arrested in August for an assault on a television crew from Hamilton.

While land negotiations drag out in the backrooms, people on both sides of this dispute are living this reality every day – a reality of tension teetering on the brink of violence.

It's shameful that the province would be proud of this record, and feel vindicated that it is doing the right thing.

Ramsay is correct when he acknowledges a "long-standing injustice" toward natives in Canada and there is a need to rectify that.

But the line has to be drawn at enforcing the law. There cannot be different classes of law for different classes of people. That undermines the very equality we strive for and cherish in Canada.

But the occupiers of the site are openly flouting that.

Pat Houlley, a native protestor from Six Nations in New York state, said Miller should never have been charged because, as a native, he isn't subject to Canadian law.

That's a scary prospect. Where does one draw the line?

The people of Caledonia – and Six Nations for that matter – have every right to expect to live their daily lives without fear of vandalism, assault or worse.

It's the rule of law which provides that freedom. It's what allows a civilized society to function and offer its citizens such luxuries as public health care, a social safety net, elections and a charter of rights.

The rule of law is paramount in Canada's society and must be upheld.

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*This is an edited version of an editorial that appeared Tuesday in the St. Catharines Standard.*