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MEDIA LINES
December 6, 2000

Issue: Breakdown of negotiations towards removal of children at risk due to solvent addiction in Davis Inlet

Background: Chief Simeon Tshakapesh has requested that Health Canada step in and assist children who are at risk due to solvent abuse in Davis Inlet, Labrador.

The plight of Innu children in Labrador has quickly become a media sensation generating considerable coverage. The Innu community of Davis Inlet, Labrador has experienced serious, long-term problems with youth abusing solvents and gas sniffing. There have been a number of related deaths.

Chief Tshakapesh claims that the Government of Canada has not provided adequate support to the community of Davis Inlet to address this long standing issue.

On November 26, an agreement was reached between the Premier and Minister Tobin and Innu leadership in which it was determined that the health and safety of the children is the first and foremost priority.

A Federal-Provincial caucus met on December 5, 2000 in Goose Bay to identify ways in which the various federal and provincial agencies can contribute to the immediate and long-term issues of social dysfunction in Davis Inlet and Sheshatshui.

On December 6, 2000, Innu leaders walked out of a meeting with federal and provincial representatives. The meeting had been scheduled to try to reach an agreement on what the immediate response should be in addressing the needs of those children at who are now at risk.

LINES:

The main issue should be straightforward: Our first and foremost priority at this moment is the health and safety of the children of Davis Inlet.

Our prime focus is to work with the province and the Innu to provide assistance to the children of Davis Inlet as soon as possible.

Our immediate priority is to get professional help and care to the children of Davis Inlet; to assess their situation; and to identify the treatment and care that they require.

What is required right now is the cooperation of Innu leadership in facilitating the assessment of the children.

The proposed agreement tabled by the Innu went beyond the scope of what we had come to do and beyond the scope of commitments made on November 26, 2000, by the

provincial and federal governments.

We are committed to support the commitments that were laid out in the November 26 agreement between the Premier, Minister Tobin and the Innu Nation.

We believe that any plans in the longer term should flow from the assessment of the children's needs. These plans would include both care for those children who need to be removed from the community and support to the community itself.

In terms of today's meeting, the Innu representatives have just walked out and we are extremely disappointed. However, our primary concern remains getting professional help to the children of Davis Inlet and we are prepared to assist the province and Innu in getting help to those children without further delay.

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