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Mushuau Innu Band CouncilDavis Inlet • Labrador • General Delivery
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March 3, 1993

Mr. Clyde Wells
Premier
Province of Newfoundland
PO Box 8700
Confederation Building
St. John's, Nfld
A1B 4J6

Dear Premier Wells:

I received on March 1st a copy of a letter dated February 25, 1993, from Fred Way, Secretary to Cabinet for Intergovernmental Affairs to Peter Penashue. I am very surprised and angered by the response of Mr. Way to the critical human needs in our community. I hope that this response went out without your knowledge or approval, and I am sure that you do not accept the arrogance of his reply.

I cannot but help ask myself if your government has learned anything from all the tragedy in my community. Has the government not understood that the policies of the Newfoundland government helped to destroy our people, our self-esteem, our ability to live our lives the way we see fit, to control our own future? The Newfoundland government has to understand that if it intends to only deal with the immediate symptoms then it is saying that it intends to continue with years of incompetent half-measures which have wasted so many of our lives.

The letter from Fred Way states that the joint submission of the Mushuau Innu Council and the Innu Nation, Hearing the Voices: Government's Role in Innu Renewal, is "an inappropriate and unacceptable context within which to address the problems at Davis Inlet," or that "it had little to do with the immediate problems of Davis Inlet."

The document presented to the Governments of Newfoundland and Canada was based on our holistic seven point plan to heal and renew our community. It set out the commitments that governments had to make so that we could put all elements of our plan into effect. The Mushuau Innu Council, members of the community and the Innu Nation, assisted by the Assembly of First Nations spent many hours determining what needed to happen and this was the basis for Hearing the Voices. The seven point plan as a whole must be implemented, or we will not deal with the fundamental issues, and in a few more years there will be another crisis.

Mr. Way says that "resolution of the problem at Davis Inlet must come from within the
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that he has the arrogance to suggest that Hearing the Voices is not my position and that of the community. That is a deep insult that I do not wish to respond to.

This plan is a last chance for a fresh start... This plan addresses the immediate crisis -- urgently needed treatment for solvent abusing youth -- as well as the real causes of our problem, which we must address if there is to be healing and renewal.

— Chief Katie Rich
February 5, 1993

Mr. Way writes that he came to Davis Inlet to "discuss an approach and a process for dealing with the immediate and urgent problems of that community." That's exactly what our document does, because we recognize that the immediate and urgent problems have underlying causes that must be dealt with. Mr. Way should reread the document to understand that the plan is both about dealing with the immediate problems and ensuring that the underlying causes will be addressed. We need immediate help for our children and families but we also need an appropriate renewal centre so that alcohol and substance abuse can be addressed in a holistic fashion. We need immediate improvement in our water and sewage but we also need to regain our relationship with our land and resources and to govern ourselves so that we will feel the pride of being Innu and will no longer want to drown the pain of our lives by drinking and gas sniffing.

As we say in the document our renewal is about you recognizing our rights. Mr. Way's response treats us like children. He says he doesn't approve of our plan for our lives. Your plans have almost wiped us out. The least you can do is support how we want to heal our lives.

Mr. Wells, the situation in Utshimassit has received attention across Canada and indeed internationally because it is so clearly unacceptable. It did not happen overnight. We were a proud and independent people, masters of our land Nitassinan, but after years of interference by the government of Newfoundland and later Canada and other factors we experienced cultural breakdown, which resulted in such things as the six youths preferring gasoline induced death to life. It is impossible to deal with the "immediate problems of Davis Inlet" in the manner which Mr. Way wants to deal with them.

From your comments both public and private, I understood that you were insisting that relocation should not merely relocate the problem. We agree, for we see no purpose in living in complete despair but in new houses with running water. That is why we are looking at the underlying reasons for cultural breakdown, and many of those causes relate to the policies of the Newfoundland government.

When will your bureaucrats understand that we are not asking them whether our plan is acceptable to them or not. It doesn't matter whether it is acceptable to them. What matters is that we have a plan that will work; a plan that will renew our people and heal our spirits as well as our bodies; a plan that we have developed and that we know will lead to healing and renewal.

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If the Newfoundland government wants to cooperate in the healing and renewal of our community, a new approach will be needed. To show that your government is proceeding in good faith, I ask you to withdraw Mr. Way's letter and to attend the meeting with Minister Siddon, Bouchard, and Clark in Utshimassit, and to come prepared to make the commitments required of the Province to enable healing and renewal.

Mr. Way states that "the government will not engage in such talks under duress presented by illegal activities, such as removal of Hydro meters in the community of Sheshatshiu." That is your policy, not mine. Innu have been forced to talk with your government during decades of illegal activities. This statement appears to be an excuse for the government to avoid any significant action or commitment. If your government showed some signs of addressing the legitimate grievances of the Innu, I suggest that those meters would not be off in the first place, and the other peaceful protests undertaken by the Innu would also not have been necessary.

Last year we were about to begin building houses at the new site, and in response to this "illegal activity" you threatened programs in our community. Perhaps I should have made sure those houses were built, perhaps some of the tragedies we have since experienced could have been avoided. Do you not see how pressure is necessary to get your government to take any action or to get it to change any policies? We either have to take direct action, or have a tragedy before we are heard.

Given the totally unacceptable response by Mr. Way, we are no longer willing to deal with him in any way. We will not allow him to our community, and we will not accept correspondence from him. I would suggest that you remove him from all matters related to Utshimassit, but I do not want to interfere in the internal affairs of your government.

In closing, once again I am dismayed that Mr. Way would dismiss Hearing the Voices without any consideration, and I seek your immediate assurance that this was done by Mr. Way without your knowledge or approval, and that you intend to come to Utshimassit for the meeting with Ministers to give the required commitments on behalf of the government of Newfoundland.

Nln,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Katie Rich
Chiefcc. Peter Penashue
Ovide Mercredi
Ed Roberts