

**MEETING BETWEEN MUSHUAU INNU REPRESENTATIVES
AND THE HONOURABLE ETHEL BLONDIN-ANDREW
ON 8 AUGUST, 1996
BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Government of Canada adopted the *Statement of Political Commitments* in February, 1994, a copy of which is attached, and it was acknowledged and accepted by the Mushuau Innu Band Council, the Innu Nation, and the Sheshashit Innu Band Council on 15 April, 1994.

The *Statement of Political Commitments* constituted a recognition by the Government of Canada of, among other things, the serious situation that had arisen in Davis Inlet, and it contained a series of commitments by the Government of Canada to work with us to correct that situation and to remedy a number of other problems that we face.

A principal element of the *Statement of Political Commitments* was the undertaking by the Government of Canada to take emergency measures to improve the immediate conditions of the Mushuau Innu Community of Davis Inlet and to support the relocation of the Mushuau Innu to Little Sango Pond, subject to certain conditions.

The emergency measures and the proposed relocation were intimately linked. The parties recognized that relocating us from Davis Inlet to Little Sango Pond would not make a maximum contribution to our healing efforts unless we were involved in every phase of the design construction and operation of our new village. The emergency measures that were designed thus served a dual purpose: they contributed towards the improvement of the housing and other infrastructure at Davis Inlet, thereby alleviating conditions there until the relocation to Little Sango Pond could be implemented; and at the same time they provided us with the opportunity to acquire the education, training, and experience that we require in order to be able to play the fullest possible role in our own relocation.

Financial support for the emergency measures in Davis Inlet in 1994 and 1995 came principally

from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and from Human Resources Development Canada. In simple terms, the funding from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development allowed us to buy the supplies and materials that we needed in order to improve the housing and infrastructure at Davis Inlet, while the funding from Human Resources Development Canada allowed us to hire trainers and trainees.

Construction of the new village at Little Sargo Pond will not begin before 1997, assuming - as seems likely - that it is approved by Cabinet. We had assumed, therefore, that the programme of emergency measures/training/employment would continue at least until that time. Indeed, it may need to continue longer, because the construction of the new village will not offer significant employment until the second or third year. In addition, the period since 1994 has not been long enough to permit us to acquire the full range of skills and experience that we need in order to participate fully in the construction and operation of our new village.

On 16 May, 1996, The Honourable Ron Irwin informed Chief Katie Rich that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would allocate 1 300 000\$, that Health Canada would allocate 250 000\$, and that the Department of the Solicitor General would allocate 125 000\$ for emergency measures during the fiscal year 1996-1997.

The absence of any funding from Human Resources Development Canada was striking, since it had provided approximately 1 000 000\$ in each of the two preceding years.

On 24 May, 1996, Chief Katie Rich wrote to The Honourable Douglas Young, urging him to provide funding and requesting a meeting. We append a copy of that letter.

No written reply was received to that letter, but the Chief was advised by telephone that Minister Young had said that it would be impossible for him to meet her at any time during the Summer either in Ottawa or in his riding office. He suggested that the Chief meet you.

On 3 July, 1996, Chief Katie Rich wrote again to the Honourable Douglas Young, stating that

she would be pleased to meet you, but that she would still appreciate an opportunity to meet Minister Young in order to state what she believed to be the very strong case for funding of the Mushuau Innu. We attach a copy of the Chief's letter.

Minister Young replied to Chief Rich's letter of 3 July on 9 July, 1996. His reply, a copy of which we append, contained the remarkable assertion that *The provision of financial assistance by the Government of Canada to the Mushuau Innu First Nation is the responsibility of my colleague, The Honourable Ron Irwin, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development...*

On 24 July, 1996, Chief Katie Rich replied to The Honourable Douglas Young, pointing out that the provision of financial assistance to the Mushuau Innu is the responsibility of the Government of Canada as a whole, including Human Resources Development Canada. We append a copy of the Chief's letter.

The purpose of today's meeting is to follow up on the suggestion of Minister Young by asking that you intervene strenuously, personally, and immediately to ensure that we receive a reasonable amount of funding for training and employment in the fiscal year 1996-1997.

Our strategy over recent years has been to strike a balance between providing training in such skills as carpentry, plumbing, heavy equipment operation, and electricity, which will be vital for the construction and maintenance of our new village, and training, given by our own Elders, in traditional skills, such as making snowshoes, which are equally vital if we are to preserve and revitalize our own culture. Training in traditional skills can be given at almost any time of the year, but training in construction-related trades can be given only during the short summer season. It is already early August, making it vital that we be able to begin that training within the coming days. It is, of course, not only a matter of training, but also of upgrading the housing and infrastructure, to provide our members with a reasonable standard of living and to contribute towards reducing the social and physical ill-effects of overcrowding.

We have also used some of the money from Human Resources Development Canada to provide

AUG- 5-96 MON 10:47-

PAUL F WILKINSON & ASSOC

FAX NO. 5144820036

tuition in the community to young persons who had abandoned their education. Several have completed Grades 9 and 10, and they now wish to complete Grades 11 and 12. Other young Innu, inspired by their example, also wish to resume their education. The success of this venture is attributable largely to the fact that, for the first time, the students have not been obliged to leave the community to pursue their education. We have also built a solid cooperative relationship with the Labrador College, which has provided teachers and pedagogical materials under contract to the Mushuau Innu Band Council. Unless we receive funding from Human Resources Development Canada, we shall not be able to offer our young persons the opportunity to pursue their education.

We are grateful to you for having agreed to meet us. We hope that you will be able to inform us that Human Resources Development Canada will be able to provide an appropriate level of funding for us in the current fiscal year.



Chief Katie Rich
Chief
Mushuau Innu Band Council



Kashetan Rich
President
Mushuau Innu Renewal Committee

©DAVIS.CORP 11/10/1996