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Société Makivik
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Nunavik Inuit Optimistic on Housing Following Meeting with Québec Ministers

September 8, 2016 – Kuujuaq, Québec – Nunavik Inuit leaders emerged hopeful for housing solutions following a meeting with Québec Ministers Martin Coiteux, Geoffrey Kelley and Ungava Member of the National Assembly Jean Boucher. The discussions took place on September 1, 2016 at the Kativik Regional Government (KRG) boardroom with the key Inuit leaders representing organizations working on the housing file for all Nunavik Inuit – Jobie Tukkiapik, President of Makivik Corporation; Jennifer Munick, Chairperson of the Kativik Regional Government (KRG); Lucy Kumarluk, KRG Vice-Chairperson; and Daniel Oovaut, President of the Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau (KMHB). Staff for the respective Inuit organizations, and Québec delegation also attended.

Martin Coiteux is Québec Minister of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy, Public Security, Minister responsible for the Montréal region, and for the Société d'Habitation du Québec (SHQ). Geoffrey Kelley is Minister responsible for Native Affairs.

Inuit leaders at the meeting outlined the main issues characterizing the current housing crisis in Nunavik, notably an imposed rent scale increase making it virtually impossible for the majority of the Inuit population to make ends meet. The SHQ unilaterally imposed maximum rent increases of 8% annually since 2010. Rents have more than doubled since 2005. The lack of a functional Home Ownership Program means that Inuit with good paying jobs are unable to buy their own homes as there are numerous impediments to build, finance, and operate a private home in Nunavik. Finally, funding issues affect the current construction of 60 units to be ready for occupation by Christmas 2016 plus an additional 10 elder's homes, and a further 140-150 units by Christmas 2017 stemming from the \$50-million housing announcement by the Trudeau government in last April's federal budget.

“I was pleased to hear Minister Coiteux use the word ‘restart’ in describing his approach to solving this current impasse,” said Jobie Tukkiapik. “ We were unfortunately at loggerheads with the SHQ on a few key issues. Minister Coiteux demonstrated an understanding of our situation with that organization, and he came with a solution, not more stalling.”

“Following our meeting with MM. Coiteux, and Kelley, we are optimistic in resolving the housing negotiations deadlock with the Quebec Government and we look forward to discussing with the negotiators recently appointed. However, there’s still a lot of work to be done and we have to rebuild the trust between all stakeholders involved. The cost-of-living study will be delivered this fall and I’m convinced its conclusions will clearly demonstrate the struggles faced by Nunavimmiut and will confirm our concerns on housing. We also agreed the rent scale is a priority for all the parties involved and we are determined to quickly putting measures in place”, declared KRG Chairperson Jennifer Munick.

“Inuit want to buy their own homes,” said KMHB President Daniel Oovaut. “But salaries are basically flatlining right now, rent is eating up so much of people’s pay, and the result is Inuit can’t save enough money to buy a house. There are major problems that need to be fixed urgently.”

During a recent telephone conversation between Makivik President Mr. Tukkiapik and Phillippe Couillard, the Québec Premier promised to name a negotiator independent of the Société d’Habitation du Québec.

“Québec Premier Couillard promised a ‘Negotiator’ would be named to fix this issue for Nunavik Inuit. Ministers Coiteux and Kelley indicated the name would be made public shortly, and the person would have the tools to make decisions rapidly on the current rent scale issue, and the swift development of a new Inuit Home Ownership Program. I was particularly pleased that we will be dealing directly with the new negotiator and further that Minister Coiteux has a candid understanding from us regarding the issues we have faced, and continue to face with the SHQ,” stated Jobie Tukkiapik.

Considering the urgency of the file, the first meeting between the negotiator and the Inuit representatives on the housing file, composed of officials from Makivik, KRG, and the KMHB, is expected to take place later in September in the Nunavik region.

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