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Follow-up on the Katimajit conference

**A MEETING THAT REVEALS ENCOURAGING PROGRESS
AND TARGETS STIMULATING CHALLENGES**

Montréal, March 6, 2009. – It was in the presence of Québec Premier Jean Charest, that representatives of the governments of Québec and Canada, as well as leaders of the Inuit nation participated in the political follow-up meeting on the Katimajit conference. This meeting was co-chaired by Chuck Strahl, Federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Pierre Corbeil, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Pita Aatami, President of Makivik Corporation, and Maggie Emudluk, Chair of the Kativik Regional Government. At the end of the meeting, everyone said that they were satisfied with the progress accomplished and optimistic about the future.

In August 2007, these same partners met in Kuujuaq to discuss the conditions of socioeconomic development of the Inuit in Nunavik. On that occasion, they had made several commitments and agreed to meet again to see to the follow-up. Today's meeting is the tangible result.

The follow-up meeting was an opportunity for the three partners to discuss matters pertaining to health and social services, education and transportation. The discussions also dealt with the measures envisaged to reduce the cost of living in Nunavik. As all of the subjects could not be included on the agenda, the political decision-makers provided reassurance about the progress of the other files that were the subject of commitments in Kuujuaq.

Commitments that have come a long way

In 2007, several recurrent problems affecting health services and social services were targeted, ranging from the lack of housing for the staff members working in these services to problems related to youth protection, violence and dependence. Since then, new housing units have been built. The front-line and second-line services have been reinforced, notably in the youth protection field. In this case, the substantial financial assistance provided by the Government of Québec has been clearly oriented towards supporting the resources of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

(NRBHSS) and of the two health centres: possibility of increasing staff, hiring of community workers, sharing of expertise, creation of new regional organizational structures, etc. It should be pointed out that today, the Government of Québec, the NRBHSS and Makivik Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding that will allow the Inuit to continue their efforts with a view to improving the health services provided in Nunavik.

As for the commitments made by the Government of Québec in the housing field, the progress has been considerable: the construction of social housing units is proceeding well and several actions have been taken to maintain the housing stock of Nunavik in good condition. Moreover, at today's follow-up meeting, the provincial and federal governments, Makivik Corporation and the Kativik Regional Government (KRG) agreed to devote all of their efforts to addressing the serious housing shortage in Nunavik. While there are plans to renew the five-year agreement concerning the construction of new housing units, more resources will be necessary.

In the spirit of the Katimajit conference, the Government of Québec, the Kativik School Board and Makivik Corporation have banked on the educational success of Inuit youth and on the harmonious development of their full potential. Tangible form has been given to this desire notably through the sums earmarked for improving sports infrastructures and the support granted to efforts to combat dropping out of school. In addition, serious thought is being given to the supply of postsecondary educational services in Nunavik.

Finally, in the transportation field, the governments of Québec and Canada have confirmed that they will launch work this year on the runway at Puvirnituk airport and that they share the objective of this runway being available in December 2009 for jet service.

This priority project, combined with the \$1.4 million announced in 2008 for the redevelopment of the traffic area of the airport, testifies to the government's desire to contribute to the well-being of the region's citizens. The acceleration and expansion of the recent federal investments in the infrastructure field, through the historic investment of close to \$12 billion over two years, will stimulate the economy and contribute to job creation.

The last theme addressed by the participants at the political follow-up meeting was the cost of living in Nunavik. The exorbitant prices of basic articles continue to adversely affect the quality of life of the region's residents. While all of the participants recognize that the innovative measures taken to date have been useful, greater funding, offered on a permanent basis, is needed to rectify the situation. The Government of Québec, Makivik Corporation and the KRG agree that the recommendations that will come from the Québec-Nunavik Working Group on the Cost of Living will require their immediate attention, to ensure that the positive effects of the adopted measures continue beyond March 31, 2010.

A step that refocuses the mission of the partners on the priorities

"We must recognize that the governments of Québec and Canada, as well as the Nunavimmiuts have made exceptional efforts to follow up on the Katimajit conference of 2007: almost all of the commitments have been or are about to be fulfilled. In light of the discussions held today, we are forced to admit that our work is not over and that sustained attention will be required, especially concerning housing and health services," explained Pita Aatami, President of Makivik Corporation, at the end of the meeting.

"In August 2007, the Government of Canada made a commitment to improve the daily life of the Inuit and to see to it that Inuit residents, from children to elders, not only have access to better conditions, but are also able to benefit from them fully, " stated Minister Strahl. "We have accomplished great progress together since then. After having met here with our partners from Nunavik and Québec, I am convinced that by combining our efforts, we can and will resolve the questions that truly affect the daily lives of the Inuit of modern-day Nunavik."

"This meeting has allowed us to evaluate the effects of our mobilization. We can be proud of the progress accomplished since the majority of the commitments made by the Government of Québec have been achieved. However, we must be realistic and remain vigilant, as much work must still be accomplished," concluded Premier Jean Charest.

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