



Ontario Native Women's Association

Media Release

December 02, 2011

Re: Attawapiskat Needs Houses, Not Relocation and Third Party Management

For Immediate Release

Ontario – The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) is calling on all levels of government to bring the Attawapiskat housing crisis to the forefront for concrete action. Every Canadian, whether of First Nations descent or not, deserves a safe, affordable and suitable home in which to raise their families.

In October of 2011, the Mushkegowuk community of Attawapiskat declared a state of emergency to call attention to the deplorable housing conditions within their community of 1800. They, like so many other First Nation communities across the country, continue to live in what can only be termed "third-world" conditions. This reality can be directly attributed to housing shortages resulting from documented population booms that continue to be ignored by Canada despite the best efforts of First Nation governments and political representative bodies' to call attention to the increasingly volatile circumstances.

"Simply stating 'just move' is a band-aid solution that takes away the community's right to live where they want to live; it takes away their opportunities to make things work properly and to find solutions themselves," said ONWA Executive Director Betty Kennedy. She continues, "The solution seems elementary: approach the issue with the appropriate fiscal commitments and work with First Nations to implement the necessary long-term planning and actions required to fix the problems."

The punitive decision to place the community under 3rd party management will not put people in safe, suitable homes over the winter. Attawapiskat has been in a co-management position for years prior to this decision and has had a federally approved financial professional in place to assist the community. With this said, the question of accountability should not be laid at the feet of Attawapiskat, but on those of the contracted and federally paid co-manager and the government employee(s) responsible for ensuring that what was supposed to be accomplished was indeed so.

ONWA President Dr. Dawn Harvard says Canada's overly aggressive and punitive approach to Attawapiskat's call for help is 'shocking'. "This paternalistic approach to First Nation relations is outdated and Canada must be held accountable for the blatant disregard for basic human rights. These are not the actions of a free and equality driven society." She concludes, "It is time for the leaders of this country to stop playing the blame game and demonstrate real leadership by finding solutions."

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) is a not for profit organization that empowers and supports Aboriginal women and their families in the province of Ontario.