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INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

**House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
2012 Budget Consultations**

Submission from Mary Simon, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

August 10, 2011

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For a number of years, ITK has been providing Ministers of Finance with suggestions for funding items to be included in upcoming budgets.

Unfortunately – for Inuit, but also for Canada as a whole – our past suggestions have had only limited take-up.

Persistence is a well established Inuit trait. We will continue to make suggestions because we are convinced that they address real needs for Inuit and offer a real return to Canadians as well.

ITK has two kinds of recommendations to make to you today.

The first involves large-scale, big-picture ideas ... expenditures which colour the upcoming budget in a fundamental way that would go well beyond impacts on Canadian Inuit.

The second involves smaller initiatives that, while of pressing importance and priority for Inuit, would have limited implications for the country's finances as a whole.

With respect to big-picture ideas, ITK has two recommendations to make.

One relates to gaining more insight into the cost/benefit dynamics between economic and social development among Aboriginal peoples. The other relates to anticipated costs resulting from changes to the criminal justice system.

Federal budget planners, and all Canadians, would benefit from additional insight in relation to two vital questions, namely:

- What kinds of new investments need to be made to deliver a realistic chance of closing gaps in material living standards between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, within one or two generations?

- Knowing that the Canadian economy will become increasingly dependent on the contributions of young Aboriginal people, what will be the predictable costs to Canadian society of not closing such gaps?

In the past, Canada has witnessed a variety of efforts aimed, at least in part, at addressing these and similar questions.

Some of those exercises – such as the multi-year, multi-million dollar Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples – operated in an expansive, multi-themed way that perhaps blunted opportunities to focus on the intimate and dynamic relationship between economic and social development.

Other exercises – such as the 2005 Kelowna Accord – became caught up in broader political and electoral issues.

Chronic problems of economic under-development and social distress will always be difficult to address in dispassionate, fact-driven fashion.

But experience also shows that, when pre-assumptions and partisanship can be put to one side in public policy making, a solid, pragmatic consensus can sometimes emerge around what needs to be done. The Residential Schools Apology and the endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are good examples in the Aboriginal policy world.

ITK recommends that the Minister of Finance direct his department to carry out an objective examination of the two questions I have posed, and to report back to this Committee with the results of that examination.

ITK's second big-picture suggestion relates to proposed changes to Canada's criminal justice system that would result in a very large increase in the number of persons serving time in correctional facilities – a hugely disproportionate number of whom would be Aboriginal.

The projected costs of such changes have ranged from \$4 billion to \$10 billion.

Inuit are abundantly aware of the suffering caused by crime. Compared with other Canadians, we see far more crime in our communities, and, compared with other jurisdictions, rates of violent crime are not in decline.

But there is no evidence that steering federal expenditures into a massive expansion of the prison system will bring about safer communities.

And the fact that huge sums of money will not be available to invest in the prevention of crime and the reform of criminals – mental health programs, substance abuse programs, special educational needs programs, youth counseling – will result in more blighted and broken lives.

ITK's recommendation is to put a halt to the planned expansion of the prison system, and associated changes to the Criminal Code, and to re-direct a substantial portion of those budgetary resources to the enhancement of crime prevention activities, with a particular focus on young people, and to education, training efforts, and health programs within existing correctional facilities.

Turning to more Inuit-focused recommendations, I would urge the Committee to consider funding for three specific initiatives:

- \$10 million over five years as seed money for implementation of *First Canadians, Canadians First: The National Strategy on Inuit Education*
- \$15 million over five years for expanded mental health programs in the four regions (Nunavut, Nunavik in Northern Quebec, Nunatsiavut in Northern Labrador and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories) that comprise our homeland, Inuit Nunangat
- \$300 million for a concentrated two-year program of new housing construction in the four Inuit regions.

These ideas have also been described in the letter I sent to Minister Flaherty this spring.

Thank you for your attention.

Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami