

Tuesday April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Dear MP,

Today marks the official release of The Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team (AAWTT)'s position paper on the Federal Engagement Sessions on First Nations Drinking Water, now available at this link:

<http://www.safewater.org/PDFS/frontpage/EngagementSessionsFinalApril15.pdf>, a copy of which is being mailed to you for your reference. Please read the position paper from front to back and ask yourself what you can do to improve this situation. Your help and support is appreciated.

We have also attached our media release with quotes and contact information for many of our brothers and sisters on Turtle Island. Many more of our brothers and sisters are not able to speak out, since often those who voice opinions about their community's unsafe drinking water today find that their housing (or education, or treatment centre) budget will be cut tomorrow.

Paul Dewar, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, recently presented Prime Minister Harper with a signed toilet seat, to mark the lack of sanitation in developing countries as part of a campaign for increased awareness of Sanitation and Water Network (SWAN) Canada World Water Day. Many fail to realize that not every First Nation water treatment plant even has a toilet! In fact, water keepers are often at severe risk due to working in an environment that, in a non-Aboriginal community, would likely be shut down for not conforming to health and safety laws in the workplace.

Marlene Jennings, Liberal Justice Critic, wrote in a letter to the Safe Drinking Water Foundation (SDWF): "We know that the pollution from the oil sands production is causing serious health concerns for Aboriginal communities," and continued, "The Liberal opposition understands and supports your call for a regulatory framework as soon as possible. We believe, however, that regulations should be a broader strategy to improve on-reserve drinking water that also addresses issues such as operator training and infrastructure issues."

**There is no point in training operators on systems that cannot possibly produce safe drinking water, and there is no point in funding ineffective infrastructure in the first place!**

Despite Canada's lack of support at the United Nations, safe drinking water is essential for survival; it is a basic human right that deserves to be respected. First Nations communities should be given the opportunity for meaningful consultation and treaty rights should be upheld and respected.

When Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) transferred the responsibility for water quality from the federal government to each chief and First Nation through changing the fine print of our contribution agreements in 2007, we felt that this was an attempt on INAC's part to avoid its fiduciary responsibility to our people. INAC needs to live up to its responsibility to provide safe drinking water in First Nation communities by ensuring that all First Nation water treatment plants are capable of producing truly safe drinking

water. This means the water quality meets or exceeds **all** parameters of the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*, not just a select few, as Health Canada routinely monitor. Provincial guidelines are generally less strict than the federal guidelines, and even these are not acceptable. We need national drinking water quality **regulations** that apply to all people on reserves, not only those on distribution systems, and an independent First Nation commission needs to be established with the funding, expertise and authority to uphold the national regulations in a court of law.

As you read this letter, INAC is funding water treatment plants that cannot possibly produce safe drinking water. Our people are suffering from unsafe drinking water, and we are looking to you to practice due diligence and take whatever action is necessary to change this intolerable situation. Please act in the best interests of all First Nation people.

Ekosi pitma,



*Hans B.P. Louis Delor Thomas Missens*  
*M.H.H. M. O. G. Robert Pratt*  
*J.C.H.* *Member in spirit, gone but never forgotten.*

cc. MLAs