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PAUKTUUTIT
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA



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INUIT TAPIIRIIT KANATAMI



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Ajungginiaq Centre

NEWS RELEASE

Inuit leaders join together to recognize Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week

**For Immediate Release
November 28, 2006**

Ottawa – In recognition of Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week, December 1st – 5th, Martha Greig, President of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Mary Simon, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Nancy Karetak-Lindell, Member of Parliament for Nunavut, have joined together to voice the need to address the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS that are affecting Inuit today.

Given that northern communities have the highest birth and sexually transmitted infection rates in Canada, there is a growing concern that the rate of HIV infections amongst Inuit may be higher than the current available statistics show. Globally, the fastest increasing rate of HIV infections is in women 15-25 years of age.

“This is an alarming statistic,” said Mary Simon. “The education and health systems should work together to ensure young people are informed in an appropriate way about this disease.”

According to the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network “every day in Canada at least one Aboriginal person will find out they have been infected with HIV.” Many Inuit do not get tested for HIV, either because of fear of discrimination, denial or a lack of knowledge of the disease. Stigmatization can prevent people from getting tested, which can result in the increased risk and spread of HIV/AIDS in communities.

According to Nancy Karetak-Lindell, “because of the discrimination that does exist, Inuit who test HIV-positive often feel unwelcome in their own communities and may not seek the medical help required to cope with living with the disease.”

“It is essential to take charge of all aspects of sexual health, and raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted infections as it is our future generations that will be most affected,” stated Martha Greig.

She added, “Currently there are no AIDS service organizations in the North. People who are HIV-positive must travel south to receive care and treatment. It is essential that community members work towards the establishment of treatment programs and services to ensure that all Inuit faced with the challenge of living with HIV are given the right of access to care in the communities in which they live.”

“The lack of data hinders opportunities to design cultural and social health promotion strategies that will address discrimination and behaviour patterns with respect to HIV/AIDS,” said Katherine Minich, Chairperson of the Ajunnginiq (Inuit) Centre’s Governing Committee. “Vulnerable Inuit, those currently infected and at risk, need public health efforts to empower and control the circumstances of their well being in the health care system and in the North.”

Inuit organizations, including Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada and the Ajunnginiq (Inuit) Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization, are working to provide information and raise awareness of health issues such as HIV/AIDS among health care providers and Inuit communities.

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