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MEDIA RELEASE

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INNU NATION CHALLENGES UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DEBORAH COWEN – MUSKRAT FALLS
OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER JUSTIN TRUDEAU
OFFENSIVE AND FACTUALLY INCORRECT

NATUASHISH, NL – Labrador Innu leaders issued an Open Letter today to University of Toronto Associate Professor Deborah Cowen in which Innu Nation asserts that Cowen made false and misleading statements in a letter issued July 31st, 2108, requesting Prime Minister Trudeau and the Government of Canada call a temporary halt to the Muskrat Falls Project in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Gregory Rich, Grand Chief of the Innu Nation said “Not only are Associate Professor Cowen’s statements in relation to Innu false, Innu Nation and our membership are astonished that Associate Professor Cowen has the gall to talk about Indigenous Rights yet she deliberately did not consult with us”. “Her actions are nothing short of disrespectful and arrogant and we want an explanation,” continued Grand Chief Rich.

“Innu Nation respects and values academic freedom of opinion”, said Deputy Grand Chief Etienne Rich. “However, it is clear that Associate Professor Cowen does not have the same respect for Innu and our right to equal consultation or regard for the truth for that matter and she and those who signed the letter could have done better.”

In addition to the absence of consultation with Innu, Innu Nation also said that the statement that the Independent Experts Advisory Committee (IEAC) seconded the 2016 Harvard Study in its recommendation to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is also untrue.

And that furthermore, Innu Nation undertook independent scientific review of the measures proposed for soil and vegetation removal and voted to oppose the IEAC’s recommendation based on research that indicates that disturbing the vegetation and soil will likely lead to an increase in methylmercury beyond what is predicted from flooding alone. Innu Nation is extremely concerned that the extensive measures proposed by the IEAC are unproven, having never been done elsewhere in the world.

The probability of increased environmental damage is not acceptable to Innu Nation and Innu leadership say that as their research is equal to that of what has become known as the Harvard Study (Schartup, et al) that they will not risk the health of their people and their lands to test a theory of the magnitude proposed for Muskrat Falls by the IEAC.

The Muskrat Falls Project is in the heart of Innu Nation territory. Innu Nation has been in intensive Land Claims Negotiations for 30 years and in 2011, finalized the Tshash Petapen (New Dawn Agreement) following extensive consultation with Innu community members. The Tshash Petapen Agreement resulted in a Land Claims Agreement-in-Principle, Redress for Upper Churchill development on Innu land and an Impacts and Benefits Agreement (IBA) for the Muskrat Falls Project.

“We never agreed with the recommendations of the political “Make Muskrat Right” campaign,” stated Grand Chief Gregory Rich. “And we did not endorse formation of the IEAC simply to validate the political or academic aspirations of other groups, we expected recommendations based on science and we didn’t get that so we exercised our right to reject the IEAC’s recommendation – as did four of six leading experts on methylmercury and human health – the two scientists who voted for it were previously involved in research that supports the Harvard study so their position comes as no surprise to us.” added Grand Chief Rich.

Innu Nation is asking Associate Professor Deborah Cowen to take responsibility within her academic circles for her ill-informed statements to the media and that she and others who signed onto the Open Letter to Prime Minister Trudeau apologize to the Innu Nation for the lack of consultation and misstatement of facts.

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