



**National Aboriginal Housing Association
Association Nationale d'Habitation Autochtone**

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OPEN LETTER TO ALL WITH AN INTEREST IN ABORIGINAL HOUSING

SUBJECT: AN INVITATION FOR MEMBERSHIP IN NAHA FOR 2009

I would like to introduce you to the National Aboriginal Housing Association. The mandate of the Association is to unite rural, northern, and urban Aboriginal housing corporations into a unified whole, to advocate on behalf of its members at all levels of government; to provide support and leadership for the delivery, development, and management of quality affordable Aboriginal housing throughout Canada; to engage in research to enable the Association to better carry out any of its objectives; and to foster networking, information sharing, communications, and exchange of ideas amongst members and other organizations. The NAHA held its founding meeting at Lebreton Flats in Ottawa in 1993 in response to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's announcement to freeze the continued growth of the Urban Native Housing Program. With a fifteen year history, the Association continues to operate, despite very limited support from government.

As you are aware, the entire Aboriginal housing continuum from shelter to stable housing is the worst in Canada. At the NAHA Conference in June, 2008, we declared we would pursue a renewed effort to obtain resources and an enlightened spirit to work with the Aboriginal community – First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples - to obtain barrier-free, safe, decent and affordable housing.

Today, many Aboriginal housing corporations are facing the insurmountable task of maintaining existing housing at the same time they are scrambling to meet the housing demands of a growing urban Aboriginal population. Over the past decade, the urban population in most centres throughout Canada has doubled, and continues to grow, as does the need for adequate, safe and affordable homes. Moreover, more and more First Nations citizens are continuing to move into urban areas, and already make up about 65% to 90% of the people in urban Aboriginal housing units coast to coast.

In the years ahead, the operating agreements under the Urban Native Housing Program will expire and that will bring to an end the operating subsidies that we rely on to maintain our operations. Are you ready for that?

Programs set up under the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Trusts (2006) are still in development stages, with success evident only in provinces that acted early to design a workable program and mount a delivery system which includes Aboriginal people.

While the Affordable Housing Initiative has worked fairly well for the mainstream population, there is not the same sense of urgency on the part of most provinces to make the Trust Fund produce homes. In fact two and one half years after the announcement of the Housing Trust fund, very few, if any, additional Aboriginal units have been acquired or built anywhere in Canada. The unfairness of it all is that some governments are not accepting responsibility for the lack of success, but boldly choosing to cast blame on those who have the least control, the Aboriginal community. It's a natural response! Are your community's housing needs being met?

Finally, the economy is a wreck and governments have not mentioned a capital infrastructure injection that includes housing, not even in the face of a vigorous challenge by other political parties. Housing has a strong history in economic recovery planning with a double-barrelled impact in both the social and economic realms. Why is the rest of the world confronting economic reality and we are not?

In order to find out more about NAHA I invite you to visit our website www.aboriginalhousing.org On the site you will find a link to "*Building Homes, Building Futures: A Time for Renewal*"- A Report on the 2008 NAHA Conference", along with the "*National Aboriginal Housing Association's Annual General Meeting Report 2008*". Please take the time to read these reports to inform yourself and your organization of the challenges and opportunities that confront all Aboriginal housing corporations. We hope that this will encourage you to become a member.

A brief summary of NAHA's recent accomplishments and its work schedule for the upcoming year are attached for easy access. We are also attaching a flier with **10 good reasons** why your organizations should join NAHA . You may discover many more!

It would be misleading if I left you with a sense that we are financially sound. We have done all the things we have accomplished to date with very limited funding. Moreover, we are without the necessary financial resources to undertake all that we envision needs to be done. We need your help! NAHA has the role and the responsibility to keep this country's Aboriginal housing voice alive and to create change for the better, so that we all might benefit. We rely on volunteers, membership dues, and project-based funding to keep NAHA operating.

Our people continue to suffer because of inadequate housing, and to make headway in addressing this problem, a single, unified voice must be heard! It is the collective effort that gets the ear of the decision-makers!

For the above reasons and many more, we encourage your organization to join the National Aboriginal Housing Association. Together, we will be stronger, and together, we will face the difficult challenges of the times with solutions that we know will work for us.

In closing, I ask that you join our movement, **join NAHA and step forward to help** develop the Housing Agenda in Canada!

Membership is open to all Aboriginal housing delivery corporations and organizations. Associate membership is open to all other organizations that support efforts to improve housing conditions faced by the Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

Please feel free to call should you require further information in helping you arrive at your decision.

You may call me on my cell phone at 604-250-5755, or our Executive Director at 613-236-0288 or (Cell) 613-371-6517

T'ooyaksiy niin (thank-you)

Sincerely,



Patrick R. Stewart, MAIBC, MRAIC, LEED AP, (Luugigyoo/Nisga'a), President

Appendix 1

Summary of NAHA's Recent Accomplishments

On the advocacy front, the year was full. The Association made a number of high impact presentations.

We made several presentations to:

- Miloon Kothari, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the housing of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Mr. Kothari's report carries many of NAHA's recommendations and can be found on our website
- NAHA made a presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, chaired by the Honourable Art Eggleton, focussing on poverty, housing and homelessness; (Go to www.aboriginalhousing.org for final Committee Report)
- We made a presentation to the Provincial/Territorial Housing Ministers meeting held in Vancouver, BC.
- A brief was presented to the Forum on the Social Determinants of Health; and we continue to sit on the steering committee for the next conference.
- Met with Minister Monte Solberg, along with the President and the Vice President of CMHC.
- Made a presentation to Provincial/Territorial Housing Ministers.

We also maintain close ties with the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA). It is part of our vision to continue working in partnership with the CHRA to form a strong bond of unity where they speak with us and not for us on housing issues. We have learned that there is strength in solidarity across many lines and with that, success in common endeavours.

Challenges in the Coming Year

Secure funds to mount an ambitious research plan that consists of:

- A New Non Reserve National Aboriginal Housing Strategy;
- A National Report on the Progress of the Urban Aboriginal Houses Trust Funds;
- Energy Conservation: Doing our Share
- Assisted home ownership
- Engaging Aboriginal Youth to Improving Access to Housing
- Creating a 10 year National Housing Plan

Develop Models of Operation to Address the Termination of Operating Agreements/Subsidies
Actively participate in the INAC/NAFC Aboriginal Policy Research Conference;

Mount a Membership Campaign to bolster the ranks of the NAHA;

Engage provincial and federal governments policy issues related to Aboriginal social and affordable housing.

Promote and Pursue Partnerships: Habitat for Humanity, National Coalition on Housing & Homelessness, Canadian Housing Renewal Association, the Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada and others

Encourage stronger relationships between local Aboriginal housing corporations and municipal governments to include housing in city planning

Engage in social enterprise as a source of greater self sufficiency revenue: Safe-T-Elements, Ameresco Canada, Shelter Systems International.

Host a national conference in Vancouver, BC in September 2009