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Nunavut Maligaliurvia  
Legislative Assembly of Nunavut  
Assemblée législative du Nunavut

RELEASE

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## **Caucus Retreat outlines core Government Priorities for first term**

**Baker Lake, Nunavut (June 17, 1999)** - Nunavut's nineteen MLAs concluded their first full caucus retreat on Thursday afternoon with a commitment to focus on the issues of healthy communities, self-sufficiency and simplifying government.

The three-day gathering was to establish priorities. It built upon the Kimmirut Retreat held in mid-April, from which the Premier and Cabinet came forward with a number of goals for Nunavut's new government.

"The opportunity for all Members to focus on setting our priorities has been invaluable," said Kevin O'Brien, Chair of Caucus.

A central point of agreement for all Members was the need to concentrate on building a strong education system in Nunavut. Baker Lake MLA Glenn McLean said, "One thing Cabinet heard very clearly from the Regular Members is that the youth of Nunavut deserve an education system that not only equips them with the skills they'll need in the 21st century, but also reflects the unique values of our territory."

Caucus spoke to the importance of addressing gaps in the areas of housing and community infrastructure in order to meet the needs of all age groups: youth, adults and Elders.

Other items of discussion included key operational issues for the government, including the capital planning process and decentralization.

Premier Paul Okalik said, "This event has provided us with important strategic direction and input. We'll be using this in August, when Cabinet meets in Bathurst Inlet to finalize the Mandate Statement that will guide us over the next five years."

A number of positions and decisions were taken during the Retreat:

### **Investing in Education and Healthy Communities**

Caucus expressed its determination that issues not be addressed in isolation. Economic opportunity, healthy lifestyles, academic excellence and relevant, innovative cultural programs were all cited as being equally critical elements of strong Nunavut communities. Caucus also emphasized that while government has an important role to play, the future of Nunavut and its youth depends on the continued active involvement and support of families.

### **Inuit Teacher Education Program and Nunavut Nursing Program**

Caucus supported an initiative by Ministers Arvaluk and Picco to commit funds for a new Inuit Teacher Education Program and Nunavut Nursing Program. These programs will focus on preparing Inuit for careers in these fields. Specifics on the programs will be announced shortly by the Departments of Education and Health and Social Services.

### **Decentralization**

Strong support for the principle of decentralization was expressed. Caucus is committed to providing Nunavut's smaller communities with the economic benefits and job opportunities associated with a government closer to the public. Regular Members will be asked for feedback after the Cabinet's meeting in Iqaluit at the end of June to discuss in detail the government's decentralization plan.

### **Resource Royalty Regime**

Caucus re-emphasized its support for the government's ongoing efforts to secure a more favourable share of tax/royalty revenues from the federal government, to reduce Nunavut's dependence on federal transfers.

### **Law Review Commission**

Caucus approved the basic structure of the proposed Law Review Commission, which is being established to achieve the government's commitment to making Nunavut's body of legislation more appropriate for the new territory. Special emphasis on the role of Elders and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit will be placed on the work of the Commission. An advertisement and general call for public nominations will be made in the near future.

### **Government Accountability**

Caucus agreed that the current method of selection of the Premier will remain in place to ensure that the holder of the position is accountable at all times to the elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Caucus further agreed that a mid-term review of Cabinet will take place during the course of the government's term of office.

### **Capital Planning Process**

Following on the commitment in the Budget Address that the next capital planning process would involve extensive input from across Nunavut, Caucus agreed that community consultations for the 2000-2001 capital plan will be held in the Fall of this year. Caucus further agreed that the issue of standards and criteria will be reviewed by the government, to ensure that the needs of smaller communities in building their infrastructure will be met.

### **Official Symbols of Nunavut and July 9 Public Holiday**

During the Fall Session of the Assembly, which will begin on October 20, the Assembly will recommend official symbols for the territory to accompany Nunavut's new flag and coat of arms. The public will be asked to make suggestions prior to the Assembly's reconvening. Caucus also agreed that the government will work towards making July 9 a Nunavut-wide holiday.

Much of the Retreat's series of meetings took place in the open air near the Prince River. In addition to working sessions, the Premier and MLAs met with community leaders, youth groups and respected Elders. Olayuk Akesuk, MLA for South Baffin, said, "The hospitality of the people of Baker Lake has been phenomenal. After an intense budget session in the Assembly, the chance to meet here during a beautiful Kivalliq spring helped us to focus on meeting the expectations of our constituents and communities."

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