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In Recognition of the National Day of Action in Canada, Women at International Conference Demand Freedom for the Sake of All Children

Darwin, Northern Territory, AUSTRALIA (June 29, 2007) – “We were shocked to see the Australian government sending in the military to invade Indigenous communities under the guise of protecting children,” says Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada and Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. President Jacobs and Ms Pate are in Darwin as keynote speakers at an international conference.

“I arrived in Australia as the country was advised of the acquittal of a police officer who admitted that he was responsible for the death of an Aboriginal man,” stated Kim Pate. “Then, a few days later, I learned that the federal government was sending the police and the army in to Aboriginal communities with a plan of addressing the sexual abuse of children. The whole thing is outrageous and unbelievable, but it is really happening here!”

“I could not believe what I was hearing and reading when I arrived two days ago,” adds President Jacobs. “The federal government is saying that they are responding to a report about child sexual abuse entitled, *Little Children are Sacred*. Questionable government measures in the Northern Territory, has left women and children scared. The women we have been meeting with here have asked for our support in demanding that the Australian government do no more harm. The safety and well-being of Indigenous children is paramount. Indigenous leadership in the Northern Territory is seeking to work collaboratively with governments and the communities affected to ensure that children are protected. We support the Indigenous women leaders in Australia who are calling for greater investment in the services that support Indigenous families and communities, the active involvement of these communities in finding solutions to these problems and federal government engagement to fund delivery of basic health, housing, social and education services to remote communities.”

“We endorse the call of Indigenous women here to the Australian and Territorial Governments to respond to their calls for resources to fill these gaps in services” affirmed Pate. “Just like we are seeing in Canada, complex issues are inter-twined with the issue of violence against women and children and community action and ownership is required to respond in an effective way to address issues. Non-Aboriginal peoples need to acknowledge the ongoing effects of colonization and policies which have caused trauma, loss and the breakdown of communities.”

“Women here in Australia are clear that Prime Minister Howard’s blatant political opportunism is not fooling anyone, especially not the women gathered here in Darwin for this international conference. It has been an openly stated agenda that Prime Minister Howard wants to move Aboriginal people off their lands. The women here are outraged and are refusing to be emotionally coerced. We know that the Stephen Harper government has followed the examples of the Howard government in a number of areas, but we are clearly saying that both governments need to follow the leadership of Aboriginal women. In Australia, the women are demanding that to truly impact the issues, the governments need to resource local people. Only then will they act in a meaningful way to effect change and create healthy futures for individuals and Indigenous communities. This is paramount. We support the demands of Australian women that the authority of Indigenous women leaders be recognized, so that they have control of the requisite resources to solve the problems in their communities,” concluded President Jacobs and Ms Pate.

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