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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Response to the Education Act Review final report

IQALUIT, Nunavut (November 16, 2015) – The Languages Commissioner is responding to the final report of the Special Committee to Review the *Education Act* tabled November 5th, 2015 in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. As recommended in her submission to the special committee the Languages Commissioner agrees that the *Education Act* should provide an overall goal or vision statement (page 9 of Special Committee final report). As well as the need for standardization of the writing system in Inuktut (page 10). Finally, the Languages Commissioner agrees that "…early childhood education is an important aspect of educational success" (page 12).

"However, the final report is seemingly regressive in protecting and revitalizing Inuktut that Nunavut has worked so hard to set up. There are statements made in the report that are quite troubling", says the Languages Commissioner, Sandra Inutiq. The special committee infers the choice is between "strong academic foundation" or one "including language, culture and history" (page 9). "The suggestion that it is a choice between language, culture and history or an academic one is a continuation of a colonialistic idea that Inuit culture and language is inferior, and cannot be academic. Language, culture and academics should not be viewed as mutually exclusive" Inutiq continues.

Through the language acts, Nunavut strives for equality of all official languages. *Inuit Language Protection Act* and some provisions in the *Official Languages Act* recognize that the Inuit language needs the heaviest up lifting to bring it up to par to achieve substantive equality with the other official languages of English and French. Since the *Education Act* was drafted at the same time, the objectives of that act and language acts are consistent. "It is not clear to me what is meant by the statement "cross-

legislation requirements must accommodate the *Education Act* itself". Unless there is a suggestion that this language right should not exist. Taking away rights is serious" Inutiq states.

The special committee also proposes a single model (page 14) stating it would make it simpler to deliver education. It is not clear what language is being proposed as the medium of instruction with a single model. In the Languages Commissioner's written submission, it states varying linguistic realities of communities should be considered. In order to protect and revitalize Inuktut, different options have to be considered given these differing linguistic realities.

The special committee also states that, due to the inadequate level of bilingual educators, there should be "a single language of instruction model" (page 14). It is worrying to deduce what language is being proposed given the pretext given prior to this statement. Even though the recommendations include the insistence that efforts to promote, recruit and retain teachers and educators continue (recommendation 12). "If English is to be the main language of instruction, this is continuation of assimilation and will put Inuktut at further risk. We have to ask ourselves if this is what we want as a territory". Striving for substantive equality is "complex and difficult to manage", without a major impetus Inuktut will continue to decline in use at an accelerated rate given our young population.

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