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December 21, 2012

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Via email

**Subject: Idle No More - 10 days is enough,
it is time to show leadership and meet with Chief Spence**

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, representing close to 200,000 nurses and nursing students across this country, urges you as Prime Minister to meet with Chief Teresa Spence of Attawapiskat First Nation, as a gesture that things will change in 2013.

There is no question that Chief Spence's people are suffering and that her hunger strike is calling attention to deplorable conditions. The housing situation at Attawapiskat made international headlines in 2011. Leaders there declared a state of emergency for the third time in three years in response to health and safety concerns due to inadequate housing. We understand many residents amid falling temperatures were living in tents, trailers and temporary shelters, and many residences and public buildings lacked running water and electricity. We even heard of an example of children, the elderly, and the ill sleeping in rooms just a few feet away from a 2009 raw sewage spill that had not been adequately cleaned up. We know that Attawapiskat is not the only First Nations community in crisis.

The story is all too familiar for Attawapiskat and other First Nations communities; they have become Canada's shame. Chief Spence says that the federal government has embarked on an agenda that flies in the face of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. As Prime Minister you have a responsibility to change this.

Chief Spence's action has helped to galvanize a movement called Idle No More, which arose as a result of the federal government's recent omnibus Bill C-45. The legislation amends the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*, which will allow the government to approve projects on more than 160 lakes without consulting First Nations. Bill C-45 also makes changes to the

Indian Act, including land management on reserves, that make it easier to lease out land for economic development without consulting band residents. The impact of these changes will be devastating for many First Nations communities who have been already frustrated by the lack of respect for their treaty rights. There is also continuing frustration over a lack of action in the cases of more than 600 aboriginal women who have been murdered or gone missing in the past 20 years.

Canada's nurses are asking you as Prime Minister to work cooperatively with First Nations leaders to bring real resolutions to the problems facing First Nations communities on an urgent basis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Linda Silas', written in a cursive style.

Linda Silas

cc. His Excellency the Right Honourable David Lloyd Johnston,
Governor General of Canada

The Honourable John Duncan, Minister of Indian Affairs