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Opening Statement
Media Release
**PwC report “The Cost of Not Successfully Implementing Article 23:
Representative Employment for Inuit within the Government”**

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The formal reason for this announcement today is to talk about Article 23 of the Nunavut Agreement, the founding document of Nunavut, signed almost 25 years ago.

But what I really want to talk about is hope and confidence – I want to talk about improving our quality of life.

About economic growth.

About lowering the cost of government.

About living up to a solemn agreement that has been ignored for years.

First, I want to say a few words to Inuit.

As Inuit, we negotiated with the federal government for many years and, finally in 1993, a legal agreement was struck. In the agreement Inuit were promised specific things like Inuit participation in decision-making and Inuit employment in government at a representative level.

These promises have NOT been realized. As a result, we have not yet achieved the dream that is Nunavut. We have yet to gain access to essential services in our own language and Inuit continue to be underrepresented in program design and service delivery.

You have a right to be frustrated, and to demand better. Your hopes rest on having fair access to opportunity in our land, and you are entitled to that. Make your voices heard, demand action today.

To all Canadians I want to provide a clear picture of what brought us to where we are today, and how easily we can improve things.

Regardless of the serious issues we face in our communities, I want to say how very hopeful I am about the future for Nunavut. Just as Canada is a hopeful country, so too are Inuit.

Our young people – and we have a very young population – have a great, powerful spirit. Not only do we want to nurture our culture but we also want to participate in the modern economy.

I know the mothers and fathers, and grandparents like me all feel deeply that we must fight to ensure that we and our younger generations have opportunity to live a healthy life.

But we can't achieve our goals and dreams if we are denied access to a large number of the best jobs available in the territory. Today, Inuit make up 85% of the population of Nunavut but hold just 51% of public sector jobs. What's more, the average income of an Inuk individual in government is \$20,000 below that of a non-Inuk individual.

Article 23 promised a representative public sector employment levels. Inuit Employment Plans and Pre-employment training programs are required to help meet these obligations and they have yet to be completed.

20 years overdue. This breach of the agreement must be remedied. Now.

Our people deserve opportunities to succeed. It was always intended that we would develop and design the programs and services which are meant to serve our needs. That this would be available in Inuktitut.

This is a question of living up to commitments. But it is also a serious economic issue.

If we continue to do nothing, it will mean that over the next 6 years, Inuit will be denied over \$1 billion in wages.

Not only that, but the cost to government will be half a billion dollars more than necessary.

Economic marginalization of Inuit is linked to poorer health and higher suicide rates.

This is a human tragedy. A tragedy that we can do something about.

Living up to this agreement is the right thing to do, on every level. It will strengthen the Inuit community, grow our economy and reduce costs for government. It will offer hope, build confidence, and inspire our young people. It will allow Inuit to contribute to the positive growth of our territory.

What will it take?

The most important factor is a commitment to change.

We need governments to promote more Inuit.

We need accelerated and expanded training programs for Inuit.

We need a stronger commitment to education, including teaching in Inuktitut.

We need thoughtfulness and consideration for those whose opportunities will change, to make way for greater opportunities for Inuit.

But what it won't take, is higher expenditures for government.

The report we are sharing with you today illustrates that exactly the opposite will occur.

By engaging unemployed and underemployed Inuit, housing subsidies alone will decline by almost a quarter of a billion dollars. Hiring costs will go down, local spending will go up, private employment will strengthen, and tax revenues will rise. Imagine the many positive outcomes when Inuit can receive government services in our own language.

I am hopeful.

This report, and the one before it in 2003, couldn't be clearer. By failing to live up to the commitments under Article 23, by denying opportunities to Inuit, governments are holding back economic growth, contributing to more health problems and hardships, and wasting tax dollars too.

The heart knows many reasons to turn this situation around.

This report tells us that there are no good reasons to keep on stalling.

NTI continues to work for the advancement of Inuit rights and for the full implementation of the Nunavut Agreement, we can all take steps – for ourselves and for our children – to seek the formal education, training and support required to move forward on our collective path.

As we each take these steps in our own lives and support our younger ones on their journey, it is important for us to use our voice and to hold government accountable for agreements that have been made with us, Nunavut Inuit. NTI remains committed to working with our government partners to address these issues.