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Ms. Donna Tingley
JPAC Chair for 2004
c/o Secretariat of the Commission
for Environmental Cooperation
393 St. Jacques Street West, Suite 200 Montreal ac H2Y 1 N9

Dear Ms. Tingley:

On behalf of the Council, the Alternate Representatives thank the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) for its recent Advice to Council 04-01 on securing the long-term involvement of indigenous peoples in the activities of the CEC.

JPAC's comments on the involvement of indigenous peoples are valuable to Council in the context of the discussions currently taking place to set new directions for the CEC. As you know, the CEC Council members, and their Alternate Representatives, are now actively engaged in the definition of results-oriented strategic plans for the three overarching priorities: (1) information for decision-making; (2) capacity building; and (3) trade and environment.

As you mentioned in your advice, in 2004, at the request of the Council, the Secretariat has been involved in implementing some concrete activities to enhance the involvement of indigenous peoples' in the work of the CEC. We agree that this important aspect should be reflected in a more focused and results-oriented work program that we are in the process of developing.

As you know, in our discussions on the Capacity-building priority, we are considering the creation of replicable model projects in Mexico which would strive, through partnerships among, for example, municipalities, industries, Aboriginal groups, and non-governmental organizations, to address an issue, or a focused set of issues, concerning matters of non-compliance with or contravention of environmental laws and regulations. This is a concrete example of future work that could be undertaken and that would involve indigenous people - to build their capacity on various issues and to integrate traditional knowledge into decision-making.

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In your advice, the JPAC recommended that indigenous peoples be nominated consistently to JPAC, NACs and GACs. As you know, each Party selects JPAC, NACs and GACs members that have experience on issues that are key to the Council or the Parties in the planning and activities of the CEC. These committees already include some indigenous representatives who make a great contribution to the deliberations of the Council or the Parties. With respect to having more systematic representation of indigenous peoples, the Council and each Party, will consider your recommendation as it develops the CEC future work program, and their needs for stakeholder advice and support.

As well, JPAC recommended the creation of a permanent position at the Secretariat that would seek to strengthen the presence of indigenous peoples in CEC's work. This is certainly a recommendation that the Council will carefully consider in the context of the redesign of the CEC work.

Therefore, the CEC Council members, and their Alternate Representatives, are carefully considering this issue and will continue their discussions on how to better involve indigenous peoples in order to build capacity for stronger environmental partnerships; and to build CEC constituencies engaged in the work of the organization.

We appreciate JPAC's solid and constructive advice as we develop the CEC's future work program.

Yours sincerely,

Norine Smith
Alternate Representative for Canada

Mr. Jose Manuel Bulas, Alternate Representative for Mexico Ms. Judith Ayres, Alternate Representative for the U.S.A
Mr. William Kennedy, Executive Director, CEC Secretariat