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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### CALL TO CONTINUE NEGOTIATIONS

Tangentyere Council is calling on the Northern Territory Government and the Federal Government to continue the negotiation with Town Camp communities around subleasing their housing, in a letter to Prime Minister John Howard, Minister Mal Brough and Minister Elliot McAdam today.

We, Tangentyere Council and the Town Camp Housing Associations, acknowledge that the issues raised by the Federal Government over recent days after the release of the *Little Children are Sacred Report* are extremely important and need urgent attention. Many of the issues raised require urgent attention within the Alice Springs Town Camp communities.

We agree with Minister Brough and the Prime Minister that the future of our children is the most important and pressing issue. We are grateful to see the determination of the Federal Government to deal with these issues.

We have undertaken and continue to undertake a range of actions to address those issues and other indigenous health issues. A working partnership with Government is urgently needed, and is what we are proposing today, with our revised housing sublease model.

This model proposes;

- a 99 year lease for any resident who wishes to purchase their house
- a 20 year lease over all remaining houses, to be held by a Northern Territory Government statutory corporation
- an agreement to negotiate with the lease holding Housing Associations to share control and management of the Alice Springs town camps with both levels of Government, and environmental health or property management industry experts, during the 20 year period

"The Federal Government is proposing to pay for leases over remote community townships for 5 years in order that they can fix up the housing and infrastructure. Tangentyere Council is volunteering 20 year leases for this very same purpose, without the need for compensation. All residents are asking for in return is ongoing input into how their housing is managed" Mr William Tilmouth Executive Director said today.

We were, and are, very concerned by the requirement that we give up our rights to our lands and the control of the housing for such a long period of time.

Nonetheless, we put to the Federal Government and NT Government a counter proposal where Town Camp communities would sublease their houses to Government for 20 years on terms that would enable them to retain input into management decisions and allow them to work with Territory Housing to deliver services to the town camps. We also agreed that individual Aboriginal families should have the right to purchase their own homes within the Town Camps if they could and wished to do so, under a 99 year lease.

Mr William Tilmouth, Executive Director said "We considered the 20 year proposal in return for a commitment to invest \$60 million was reasonable in the circumstances. This is clearly the amount of money the Federal Government considers is needed to fix up the housing and infrastructure, and we agree with that. We believed that 20 years would give the Government a sufficiently long period to implement change to the town camps while enabling us to protect our land tenure for our children and grandchildren. If it was shown to be a success there would be no reason town camp communities would not want to continue with the arrangement."

The Housing Associations have held leases over the Alice Springs town camps since the 1970s. The granting of the perpetual leases was in recognition of the longstanding occupation of those areas by our people and represents a key part of our history and culture.

We urge the Federal and Northern Territory Government to enter into urgent and meaningful negotiations with us on reasonable terms that do not require the giving up of our hard fought rights to our lands for 99 years.

For further information contact William Tilmouth on (08) 8951 4254 or mob 0408 841 708