JAN 27 2009

His Worship Fred Eisenberger
Mayor of Hamilton
230-77 James Street North
Hamilton, Ontario L8R 2K3

Dear Mr. Mayor:

I am writing in response to correspondence forwarded on your behalf to my predecessor, the Honourable Stockwell Day, by the Office of the Prime Minister concerning contraband tobacco. I am taking this opportunity to respond in my capacity as the new Minister of Public Safety.

As Minister of Public Safety, the production and sale of contraband tobacco is a serious concern for me. I assure you that the Government is taking concrete actions to address this issue. Contraband tobacco is demonstrably linked to organized crime, and contributes to destabilizing Canadian communities. Contraband tobacco is also a major concern at the Canada-United States border.

Contraband cigarettes in Canada that are manufactured on the American side of the Akwesasne reserve present a particular challenge to law enforcement. These contraband cigarettes are distributed by organized crime groups via a national distribution network that makes low-cost products available to smokers.

In response to this problem, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is working closely with First Nations communities, and other stakeholders, on the broader issue of organized crime and combating the distribution of contraband tobacco. The First Nations Organized Crime Initiative aims to fight organized crime by creating law enforcement partnerships in the First Nations communities of Ontario and Quebec, and surrounding areas. In the Cornwall area, for example, the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Department is working with Canadian and U.S. law enforcement partners to combat organized crime in and around the Akwesasne Mohawk territory.
This past year, the partnerships established between the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Department and other law enforcement organizations have led to numerous arrests in the area, and the seizure of record quantities of contraband tobacco products. These actions have prevented contraband tobacco from entering the Ontario and Quebec markets.

In May 2008, the RCMP initiated a Contraband Tobacco Enforcement Strategy with a view to reducing the availability of, and demand for, contraband tobacco across the country, and supporting the government’s health objectives. This strategy recognizes that the participation of the Aboriginal people in efforts to ensure public safety and combat organized crime is essential to achieving long-term objectives for all communities.

With regard to the Contraband Tobacco Enforcement Strategy, my predecessor, the Honourable Stockwell Day, announced that Public Safety Canada will lead a Task Force of representatives from those departments and organizations addressing the contraband tobacco problem. The Task Force’s mandate is to find concrete solutions to prevent the flow, and limit the distribution of contraband tobacco, which could include policies, programs, and relevant regulatory and/or legislative options to counter illegal trade in tobacco products. I invite you to submit your comments or suggestions to the Task Force at: TFITP-GTPIT@ps-sp.gc.ca

Thank you for your interest in these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

The Honourable Peter Van Loan, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety

c.c. The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada.