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Smithsonian Institution Libraries

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Honorable Brian Lewis
Legislative Assembly
Northwest Territories

24 March 1995

We are alarmed at the possible loss of the only qualified (Masters in Library Science) librarian position at the Culture and Heritage Division Library of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. This facility is one of a handful of libraries worldwide focusing on polar studies. It is the only one we know collecting comprehensively in the history of Canada's Northwest Territories and aboriginal cultures of that and surrounding areas. The loss of this position would be a real blow to the library's collections and services, its users in Canada and abroad, and to a written record of the history and culture of this region and its people.

Concern with the state of native populations throughout the world is an especially timely and visible one. Special collections of this sort are significant both in the rich account they preserve of these people as well as the contribution they make to further scholarship. However, such collections do not develop nor can they be maintained without knowledgeable and dedicated staff at work over the long term. This is a fact which people outside of the library/archive community often fail to realize.

The ten years Ms. Carolyn Kobelka has spent developing the library's collections and services is an example of what is required to create a specialized library. As a recipient of her monthly acquisition list, we know the kind of fine-grained collecting of library materials that has been going on. We use these lists both as current awareness tools and to guide our own selection of materials for the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. One of our staff members who met her at a Boulder, Colorado conference in 1988 praised her enthusiasm and commitment. Other Smithsonian researchers have worked in the Culture and Heritage Division Library. Together with members of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Program, they express great concern for the continued integrity of this collection and the present level of service.

As an institution of national and international value, the Culture and Heritage Division Library deserves your strongest support.

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