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HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ACTIVISTS CRITICIZE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT’S RECENT HOUSING ANNOUNCEMENT

May 26 2009, Vancouver – In the coming weeks, activists are hoping to place emphasis on the government’s failure to provide solutions to the housing crisis in Vancouver. In a recent announcement to contribute $205 million to social housing in Vancouver, the provincial government is seeking to repackage its current broken promises as “new” housing commitments, according to Vancouver Action activist Nathan Crompton. “The promise for these specific sites was made in an agreement between the city and the province in 2007, and construction was supposed to start in 2008. How on earth are they framing this as a ‘new’ commitment?”

Dave Diewert, of Streams of Justice, stresses “3,200 units of social housing were promised for completion prior to the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. When these 14 sites are finally constructed, the overall promises will still be broken because the Olympic Bid Book put our government on the line for 800 new units of social housing per year, which itself is meager in a city where there are up to 4,000 new condo units constructed per year.”

The completion of the promised buildings will be financed mostly by the sale and redevelopment of Little Mountain housing. Lauren Gill, of Community Advocates for Little Mountain (CALM), criticizes what she calls a “government shell game”. “The province’s needless destruction of Little Mountain last year caused the loss of hundreds of units of affordable housing, all destroyed for the benefit of private developer Holborn. It is absolutely scandalous that the money from the destruction of Little Mountain will now be retroactively funneled into a provincial housing initiative that was already promised years ago.”

Lauren Gill adds: “The current model is to sell off existing social housing units, like at Little Mountain and the Olympic Village, in order to construct some mostly-hypothetical units elsewhere. That is not a workable strategy. It’s not workable because of how fast low-income people across the city are being evicted for market up-scaling and rent increases. The strategy results in an overall loss of affordable options, giving the developers the keys to the city.”

In addition to the $205m from the provincial government, $20m will be provided for construction by private donors and developers. Tristan Markle, of Vancouver Action, says, “it’s offensive that the very same people causing the problem are being credited with providing the solution. Real-estate tycoons and property speculators are creating a citywide housing crisis by driving up existing property values and pushing people out the bottom. Yesterday these same millionaires donated a small fraction of their profits to distract from their culpability. But this inadequate response shows, above all, that the policy
of relying on developers and their speculator networks to solve the housing crisis they created has come to an end. We need new, neighborhood-based leadership.”

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