Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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An agreement between the Public Housing Administration and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs was signed today by Housing Commissioner Marie C. McGuire and Indian Commissioner Philleo Nash, calling for joint efforts in bringing low-rent housing to thousands of American Indian families.

Under its terms, PHA will set conditions under which loans, technical advice and other financial assistance will be forthcoming. BIA will function as coordinator between PHA and tribal housing authorities, and will assist the latter in administering and expanding a low-rent housing program for tribal members.

BIA estimates that 60,000 or more Indian families live in dwellings that are far below minimum standards of health and safety. The new agreement is designed to speed up activity in low-rent housing aid to Indian tribal members.

The two Federal agencies commenced negotiations two years ago. An earlier agreement provided for "mutual help" housing on reservations--a program under which Indian family members contribute their labor in construction of their own and neighboring homes in exchange for equity. This creates an opportunity for families whose incomes fall below minimum requirements for low-rent housing loans to acquire homes that meet standards of decency and comfort.

Already there are nearly 3,500 housing units in various stages of development on 54 reservations in 18 States.

Commissioner McGuire, in signing the agreement today, said:

"This is a forward step in continuing to help provide America's low-income Indians with the kind of housing they need. We have made a good start in this program. We know that it works and we've bad opportunity to iron out many of the bugs. We are ready now to make greater strides in this important area."

Public housing authorities have already been created by 63 tribal governments, as the initial step in helping tribal members participate in the low-rent public housing program.

Commissioner Nash observed: "For the first time, many Indian families who are members of tribes are in a position to take advantage of the public housing program. The tribal leaders and tribal members are accepting the initiative in improving family housing. Both Commissioner McGuire and I, together with our staffs, have pledged our readiness to help with all the means available to our agencies."