



**NORTHERN SOVEREIGNTY AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY IN
NORTH AMERICA**

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**CANADA'S SOVEREIGNTY IN THE ARCTIC:
AN INUIT PERSPECTIVE**

**Jean-François Arteau
Legal Counsel and Executive Assistant to the President of Makivik
Corporation**

Asserting sovereignty and jurisdiction in the Arctic is a recurring theme in Canadian history.

For example, in a memorandum dated January 21, 1953, from the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs (now the Minister of Foreign Affairs), it is stated: ***It seems desirable to examine the extent of Canadian and US activity in the Arctic, with particular relationship to the maintenance of Canadian sovereignty, and to consider whether, and in what fields, further Canadian activity is justified to serve Canadian interest of a political, administrative, scientific or military nature. Since Arctic plans take long to execute, the consideration of future policy should be pursued aggressively.***

Recent Canada's efforts on affirming its sovereignty so far seem to be more focused on addressing territorial concerns and fostering future economic development.

But there are 2 other objectives that the Inuit would like to be promoted:

1. Environmental protection
2. Improved governance

These constitute the true pre-requisites for Inuit and Northerners to have greater control over their destinies and a major say and contribution to Canadian sovereignty issues.

Here are some basic questions and comments:

The Arctic is being squizzed!!

Are non-Arctic nations have suddenly been bitten by the gold rush bug?

Can the Canadian society as whole sort out itself out, to come together and work as a whole?

Stronger Aboriginal governance through land claims: what role could it play in reinforcing Canadian sovereignty, and how these land claims groups can become a major governance force in the Arctic?

These are some of the issues that I will be alluding to during this presentation.

Makivik which means «to rise up», is the organization that represents the 10,000 Inuit of Nunavik, region located north of the 55th parallel in the Province of Quebec, Canada. Makivik has a major stake in the various issues being discussed at this workshop.

Pita Aatami, the President of our corporation, is from Kuujuaq, considered the regional capital of Nunavik.

Mr. Aatami is also a Board Member of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, organization that represents the 55,000 Inuit of Canada living in 53 communities scattered from the Western Arctic, Nunavut territory, Nunavik to Labrador (Nunatsiavut). President of ITK is Mary Simon, a well-known Inuk and former Canada's Ambassador to Denmark.

Mr. Aatami is also a Board Member of Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada. Founded in 1977 by the late Eben Hopson of Barrow, Alaska, ICC has flourished and grown into a major international non-government organization representing the 160,000 Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia. ICC has Consultative Status II at the United Nations.

MAKIVIK CORPORATION

Let me say some words about Makivik. It was created in 1978 and is mandated to protect the rights, interests, and financial compensation provided by the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement to the

Inuit of Nunavik, the first comprehensive Inuit Land Claim in Canada, and the more recent Offshore Nunavik Land Claim Agreement that came into effect in 2008.

These land claims agreements give the Inuit of Nunavik control over large portions of Nunavik and the offshore islands.

As I mentioned, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was the first comprehensive land claim in Canada, and it forever changed the relationship between Canada, Quebec and the Inuit.

Politically, culturally and economically, Makivik has been a leader in building and developing a vibrant region called Nunavik, where Inuit have established their own distinct place and identity within Quebec and Canada.

In the building of new political structures, the President of Makivik signed in December 2007 in the Quebec National Assembly, along with the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, an unprecedented and innovative agreement which will see the creation of a *NUNAVIK REGIONAL GOVERNMENT*.

This new government will be adapted to the realities of the Inuit and in line with the country's fundamental legal framework. The Nunavik Regional Government will allow Inuit and all residents of Nunavik to chart their future and determine their own priorities as a society.

In 2009, Makivik was elected as new Council member of the University of the Arctic, and intends to take a very active role. By becoming Council member, it fulfills Makivik's objective to become better known in the Circumpolar North and at the international level.

THE WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

I understand an important goal of this workshop is to engage and reach

out to the American political and policy communities, and to enhance the understanding of Arctic sovereignty issues among American scholars, academics and policy makers who specialize in northern issues and concerns.

I hope the Canadian vantage point and principally the ***Inuit perspective*** will be more present in the discourse on Arctic issues within the academic and policy communities in the United States.

This workshop is very timely, and Makivik would like to thank its organizers, the Association of Canadian Studies in the United States and its President Douglas Nord, the Centre for International Studies at Western Washington University, the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies of the University of Washington in Seattle, and Trent University of Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

*I would also like to say a **special BONJOUR** to our long time collaborator, Professor Nadine Fabbi, Associate Director of the Canadian Studies Centre at the University of Washington, whom we had the privilege to meet during the recent Makivik Nunavik delegation visit to Seattle.*

ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND THE INUIT

The Arctic is at the forefront of public policy as well as political and academic discussion centered on very important and critical issues.

In the spirit of ***taking control of the Arctic sovereignty debate***, the Inuit Circumpolar Council of Canada hosted in November 2008 the historic Inuit Leaders Summit on Arctic Sovereignty in Kuujjuaq.

Inuit delegations of Leaders from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia attended to discuss assertions of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic, the Inuit homeland.

The 2-day conference resulted in thorough discussions and perspectives

of what sovereignty means for Inuit and for others. The discussions examined concepts of sovereignty as traditionally embraced by nation-states, but also extended to the central importance of the right of self-determination enjoyed by the peoples of the world, including Indigenous peoples.

In the opening remarks by the President of ICC-Canada, Duane Smith: ***With the melting of the polar ice, the world sees emerging opportunities. Climate change may have escalated the urgency of the sovereign debate. Environment, economics, ocean transit, and the right of Indigenous peoples are all part of the equation.***

Climate change and subsequent race for Arctic resources have forced Inuit to address questions such as: Who owns the Arctic? Who can traverse the Arctic? Who has the rights to develop Arctic resources?

In the space of a few years, the Arctic has gone from being totally ignored to being the flashpoint for a new form of geopolitics.

As Peter Harrison, former Deputy Minister of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada said: ***International interest in the Arctic is heating up, because, to put it simply, the Arctic is heating up, it has become a Global Hot Topic. As the sea ice melts, access to Arctic Ocean and Arctic shorelines is becoming ever more feasible. While this is of direct interest and potential benefit to the Arctic coastal states, the sudden interest being shown by many other nations and groupings (e.g. European Union) is nothing less than astonishing.***

CIRCUMPOLAR INUIT DECLARATION ON ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

On April 28, 2009, Inuit leaders from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia launched a ***Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty.***

Here are some highlights of this Declaration:

This Declaration emphasizes the unity of Inuit as a people across four countries.

Addresses the unique relationships Inuit have within each of the respective state.

Calls for closer cooperation among Arctic states and Inuit on all matters of Arctic sovereignty.

It is in the interest of the states, industry, and others to include Inuit as partners in the new Arctic, and to respect Inuit land claims and self-government arrangements.

Inuit decision, expertise and perspectives are critical to progress on international issues involving the Arctic, such as global environmental security, sustainable development, militarization, commercial fishing, shipping, human health, and economic and social development.

SOVEREIGN RIGHTS IN THE ARCTIC AND INUIT SELF-DETERMINATION

The Inuit have always found themselves in a sovereign state. They have always been able to govern themselves and to satisfy their basic needs.

Recognition and respect for Inuit right to self-determination is developing at varying paces and in various forms in the Arctic states in which Inuit live.

Following the referendum of November 2008, the areas of self-government in Greenland will greatly expand.

In Canada, there are 5 land claims agreements: Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic in 1984 - Nunavut in 1993 - Nunavik in 1975 and 2008 - Nunatsiavut in Labrador in 2005, are some of the key building blocks of Inuit rights.

In Alaska, much work is needed to respect and implement the rights recognized in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

In Chukotka, Russia, an administrative process has begun to secure recognition of Inuit rights.

These developments provide and will provide a foundation on which to construct future, creative governance arrangements tailored to diverse circumstances in states, regions and communities.

In exercising their right to self-determination in the circumpolar Arctic, Inuit continue to develop innovative and creative jurisdictional arrangements that will appropriately balance Inuit rights and responsibilities as an Indigenous people, the rights and responsibilities Inuit share with other peoples who live among them, and the rights and responsibilities of states.

Inuit will also exercise their rights of self-determination in the Arctic by building on institutions such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council and the Arctic Council, the Arctic-specific features of international instruments such as the ice-covered-waters provision of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, and the Arctic-related work of international mechanism, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In a speech delivered here in Washington DC on April 6, 2009, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs stated: ***Canada supports the Arctic Council as the primary international institution promoting cooperation in the Arctic.*** This ministerial statement supports the view of the Inuit.

SCIENCE, INUIT TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

A variety of factors, ranging from *unique Inuit knowledge* of Arctic ecosystems to the need of appropriate emphasis on sustainability in the weighing of resource development proposals, provide practical advantages to conducting international relations in the Arctic and partner with Inuit.

Traditional knowledge **is** science. Southern scientists must learn that *western* scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge and experience **both have validity**.

Traditional knowledge was passed on from one generation to the next.

The sooner the southern scientists make use of traditional knowledge, the better it will be for their research.

Partnerships are a vital part of the strategy we must adopt in together seeking imaginative, innovative and perhaps unexpected solutions. Broadening our own understanding of the North, and drawing upon traditional knowledge as well as modern science, will improve our collective ability to operating in an environment that is fragile to begin with, and undergoing serious and rapid change.

The waters of Hudson Bay, Ungava Bay and the Hudson Strait are critical to Nunavik Inuit livelihood, and are part of the overall Arctic Ocean system.

The fish and wildlife and marine mammals in and around these areas are just as susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change as areas in the High Arctic. Nunavik coastal communities are to be just as impacted as communities hundreds of kilometers further north.

From its beginning, Inuit of Nunavik and Makivik Corporation have recognized the importance of science and research in building Nunavik economic future, protection of its natural resources and health of the communities and people.

Makivik has backed it up with financial commitments through the establishment and operation of the Nunavik Research Centre located in Kuujuaq. NRC is recognized as a first class research centre and a model for Arctic research by Inuit.

NRC is the first of its kind in Eastern Arctic Canada capable of tracing and tracking heavy metals and other contaminants, or illnesses in wildlife that Nunavik Inuit remain depended upon for their daily food.

Several research programs are carried out in collaboration with government and academic scientists from Southern Canada, the United States and with other countries.

NRC also played a key role in the International Polar Year and received major funding from the Government of Canada for the conduct of unique research projects in collaboration with other research units and institutes such as the Arctic Institute of North America.

The quality of its work was recognized in 2007 when the Nunavik Research Centre received the prestigious **GOLD AWARD** of the Canadian Environment Awards.

For all sorts of reasons - law, politics, and the very practical reason that the world stands to learn the most about the Arctic from the people who know the Arctic best - Inuit have an essential role in international discussions about Arctic waters, marine transportation plans, environment initiatives and mechanisms, as well as the future of international Arctic institutions, such as the Arctic Council.

Such endeavors have the potential to demonstrate the extent science can influence and shape policy-making.

CANADA'S NORTHERN VISION

In a Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister of Canada sets out his Northern Vision. He sees the great economic potential of the vast northern or Arctic natural resources as key to Canada overall economic future.

Canada's Northern Strategy focuses on 4 priority areas:

1. Exercising our Arctic sovereignty
2. Promoting social and economic development
3. Protecting the North's environmental heritage
4. Improving and devolving northern governance, so that Northerners have a greater say in their own destiny

The Government of Canada stated that it has a clear vision for the North, in which self-reliant individuals live in healthy, vital communities, manage their own affairs and shape their own destinies. This is a statement made in Canada's Northern Strategy document published under the authority of the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Chuck Strahl.

In his speech delivered in Washington, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon stated that: *For Canadians, the Arctic is central to our identity and our future. Canadians' future is tied to our Arctic, and awareness is growing about the challenges and opportunities it holds, including first and foremost **the well-being of Northerners**. Ensuring economic and social development in a sustainable way that benefits Arctic inhabitants, particularly Indigenous people (Inuit), is a key objective for Canada.*

Premier Charest has expressed similar views in relation to Quebec's economic future and natural resources of the northern regions of the province, especially Nunavik.

Pushing the sovereignty agenda for Inuit of Canada is the President of

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami objective, Mary Simon: *Ultimately, sovereignty begins at home. Sovereignty is apparent and implemented with healthy communities.*

Unfortunately, the declarations, statements and policies of the Ministers of the Government of Canada have not yet become a reality in Nunavik. Nunavik does not have healthy communities.

For more than 60 years, in fact since World War II, major and drastic changes have occurred that had serious impacts on the Inuit in general and on the Inuit of Nunavik: militarization of the Arctic, arrival of governments and establishment of new governance systems, compulsory residential schools, slaughtering of Inuit dogs, relocation of Inuit of Nunavik to the High Arctic.

All these changes occurred very rapidly and abruptly and resulted in major social difficulties, erosion of the culture and of the Inuit language, high level of school dropout, high level of suicide among Inuit youth, poverty, and sadly Nunavik has the highest level of overcrowding ratio in houses in Canada, which has now culminated to a **HOUSING CRISIS**.

For the President of Makivik and for the Inuit leaders of Nunavik, a major catch-up housing program should be established immediately in order to alleviate the acute shortage of houses in Nunavik.

This overcrowding is a major impediment to a decent living for the families and the youth, to a better education and stability in the communities. We do not want Inuit youth to become a lost generation.

In order to create healthy and sustainable communities, adequate and appropriate housing is essential.

While it is essential to reflect on Northern Sovereignty, I am of the opinion that fundamental needs first need to be covered and satisfied.

Nunavik Inuit organizations, including Makivik Corporation, are presently

discussing with the Government of Quebec a 1,000 unit- housing catch-up construction program.

The Government of Canada seems reluctant to sign on to any major housing catch-up program. Makivik President hopes the Canadian government will make the recent declarations and statements of its Ministers a reality in the very near future, and invites Canada to join in the Quebec-Nunavik Inuit efforts in housing.

There is a critical requirement for the Canadian Government to provide long-term, stable and predictable funding to build and manage housing in Nunavik.

CANADIAN SOVEREIGNTY AND CANADIAN PARTNERS

There is a pressing need for enhanced cooperation in Canada in relation to the Arctic.

Premiers of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut recently met to discuss issues of importance to the people of the territories, and met for the first time with the Canadian representatives of the Arctic Council Permanent Participants. They discussed their shared interests and ways to work together to advance such interests at the circumpolar level.

In their statement, the Premiers declared that they share a common interest with Arctic Council member states and its permanent participants in building healthy, sustainable communities. This includes addressing important issues such as climate change and economic development in the circumpolar region.

Furthermore, the Premiers declared that they remain committed to negotiating and implementing land claims as well as resource and self-government agreements that respect, promote and protect the rights and freedoms of Aboriginal peoples.

Provinces that have an Arctic region like the Province of Quebec have to play an active role in all these discussions and debates about Northern sovereignty and Political Geography in North America.

CONCLUSION

Inuit are increasingly engaged and vocal on these matters regarding sovereignty and related issues. Inuit inclusion as active partners is central to all national and international deliberations on Arctic sovereignty and related questions.

In this context, Makivik Corporation's position is very clear and consistent. Nunavik Inuit welcome future developments, but they must be involved and terms of the land claims agreements must be respected and fully implemented.

Furthermore, Makivik insists that future developments in the Arctic are to be supported by solid research initiatives to protect the lands, environment and wildlife.

The overall philosophy that land claims is built upon, should apply to Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic region can only be asserted by building prosperous and sustainable communities in the North.

The Inuit have shown they can adapt, change, learn and survive.

All this can only be achieved through continued consultation and involvement. Furthermore, we must move forward in partnership.