



The Inuit and the Aboriginal World

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NUNAVIK INUIT AND THE NUNAVIK REGION

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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NUNAVIK INUIT AND NUNAVIK

Nunavik is part of the Arctic world. Covering 500,164 square kilometers, Nunavik represents 36% of the total area of Québec. All located north of the 55th parallel, none of the 14 Nunavik municipalities are inter-connected by road, and there are no road connection to the road to the south of Québec.

Some 11,000 people live in Nunavik and 90% of them are Inuit and speak Inuktituut as their first language. Our statistics show that 65% of the population are under 29 years of age.

The Inuit are integrated in Québec and Canada's legal, administrative and tax regimes. The Inuit are all taxpayers, responsible for all federal and provincial

sales and income taxes on the same basis as other citizens of Québec and Canada. As such, they are supposed to be entitled to the same services as other citizens in the other regions of Québec. Nunavik Inuit suffer a cost-of-living much higher than in the rest of Québec.

Though the Nunavik region constitutes at least 42% of the entire territory contemplated by the PLAN NORD (NORTHERN PLAN) of the Government of Québec, it remains the most underdeveloped area of all of Québec.

IMPACT OF THE JAMES BAY AND NORTHERN QUEBEC AGREEMENT

It is significant that many critics of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) question why the Native parties agreed to surrender their aboriginal title to the Territory in exchange in part, for education, health, police, justice and municipal services when in fact all Québécois, all Canadians, were already entitled to receive such services.

This was especially true for Nunavik Inuit given that they pay income tax and sales taxes on the same basis as other Québécois and Canadian but do not receive the same services.

After all, an aboriginal land claims agreement/treaty is supposed to provide guarantees and benefits, which promote the aboriginal culture and way of life.

The answer lies in the fact that the Inuit (and the Cree) were compelled to use the JBNQA negotiation process not only as an opportunity to secure compensation, land and traditional practices, but also as their first and only chance to secure these other basic regional and municipal services which Canada had failed to invest in and provide throughout the pre-1975 period, i.e. prior to the signing of the JBNQA.

QUÉBEC INTEREST IN THE NUNAVIK REGION

Nunavik Inuit had inhabited and used most of the region north of the 55th parallel in Québec for hundreds if not thousands of years (long before a Québec or a Canada even existed). Peacefully pursuing their nomadic traditional ways of life – hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering – oblivious to the detailed plans which the Government of Québec was making for this Territory to harness the thousands of megawatts of power from its vast rivers.

When in 1971, Québec announced its decision to harness the hydroelectric resources of northern Québec, the Inuit (and the Cree) immediately expressed their

opposition. They mobilized and called upon Canada to intervene. Canada was clearly reticent to apply any legal or political pressure on Québec to recognize the rights of the Inuit and the Cree: to do so would have the political appearance of federal interference in the economic future of Québec.

Thus, the Inuit and the Cree were forced to face the fact that neither Canada nor Québec were prepared to recognize or respect their aboriginal rights to the land region slated for development of Québec.

On November 15, 1973, Judge Malouf granted the interlocutory injunction and stopped all work on the James Bay hydroelectric project. Justice Malouf was

astounding and original in that it confirmed that aboriginal rights could be enforced in a Court of law.

JBNQA (1975) AND WHAT IT ACCOMPLISHED FOR THE INUIT

The Final Agreement of the JBNQA was signed on November 11, 1975.

For Nunavik Inuit, their goal in the negotiations were to secure their land-base and traditional way of life. They also wanted to improve the quality of life through better community infrastructure and services, housing, educational and health services, police and justice services, and airstrips.

One very major goal of the Nunavik Inuit was to bring the level and quality of infrastructure, housing and services in their communities up to the level of similar Inuit communities in the Northwest Territories. Economic development opportunities and employment were also important Inuit goals in this process.

Inuit also wanted to have a say in decisions made on the day-to-day affairs that affected the development of their communities and of the Region, through the creation of entities such as the Northern villages, the Kativik Regional Government, the Kativik School Board and the Kativik Regional Development Council (now called Katutjiniq).

Aside from \$90 Million cash compensation and title to 3,200 square miles of Category 1 lands (full ownership) and exclusive harvesting over 35,000 square miles of Category 2 lands, the JBNQA established non-ethnic governance for Region and its communities. Nunavik Inuit opted for non-ethnic governmental entities in part so that they could benefit from the resources and funding Québec was making available to other regions and municipalities.

The JBNQA also had the major effect of transferring responsibility of services for Inuit communities from Canada to Québec. The JBNQA established a framework through which Québec could now provide capital and operation funding for municipal

infrastructure, health, education, policing and the administration of justice.

THE NUNAVIK REALITY OF TODAY

Nunavik Inuit are no longer simple traditional harvesters of wildlife pursuing a nomadic existence. In the last 50 years, there have been tremendous social, economic and cultural changes in the Nunavik region.

Today, the majority of Nunavik Inuit are part of the larger modern capitalist economy. Country food is not enough for them to survive: they need houses; income for fuel; food; transportation; rent; and household goods.

In order to secure this income, Nunavik Inuit today require education, training, skills, access to financing and capital. Nunavik Inuit have changed; their needs have changed. But, unfortunately, these needs are not being adequately met.

Over the last 35 years, enormous efforts by Makivik Corporation has been made to improve the delivery of services to Nunavik.

But despite some tangible benefits and improvements in the Nunavik region and Nunavik Inuit, the quality of life in Nunavik and its communities is both a shocking and disturbing reality. It is a reality that suggests that new facilities, new housing, new schools, new airstrips and new economic development were not enough to improve the quality of life for Nunavik Inuit.

Elders: they form 4% of Nunavik's population. With respect to the income of Nunavik elders, the average Nunavik elder's total income is 13% lower than that of person age 65 and over in the rest of Quebec combined to the very high cost of living that we have to deal with and you have a very critical situation. Most houses occupied by Nunavik elders are overcrowded.

High cost-of-living: The cost of food in Nunavik is 57% higher than elsewhere in Québec. The cost of household items in Nunavik is 97% higher than elsewhere in Québec. The high cost-of-living in Nunavik presents a major hindrance to regional

economic development and keeps many Nunavik Inuit in poverty.

Health: Nunavik Inuit life expectancy is 59.5 years for men and 67.5 years for women. In the rest of Québec, life expectancy is 76.5 for men and 82.1 for women.

Household income: Regarding the average household income of Nunavik Inuit, cost of groceries consume 44% of an average Nunavik Inuit household, as compared to 13% for households in the rest of Québec.

Employment: JBNQA beneficiaries hold only about 50% of all regular, full-time jobs in Nunavik.

Education and schooling: 53% of all Nunavik Inuit 20-64 years old never obtained a high school graduation certificate. With respect to school drop out,

from 2002 to 2007, 94% of all Nunavik Inuit high-school students drop out from school before obtaining a Québec high-school leaving certificate.

Housing: Housing in Nunavik is clearly in crisis. The overcrowding rate of housing in Nunavik is 68% which is the worst in all of Canada. Two or three families will often live in the same house. This means 12 to 15 people, from three or even four generations, live together in a single dwelling. With respect to housing overcrowding, it has a very negative impact on the lives of Nunavik children, the care they receive and the abuse they suffer.

Poverty: Between 20-30% of the Nunavik households are actually affected by poverty. This rate is 2-3 times greater than that of

the rest of Québec. Single-parent families suffer the hardest from poverty in Nunavik.

Social conditions: Social problems in Nunavik today include high levels of poverty, suicide, high teen pregnancy rates, neglect and abuse of children, family violence, high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, behavioural problems and mental health problems.

PLAN NORTH

It is our opinion that the Government of Québec must address our reality in their Plan North before even thinking of any development on our territory.

It is our view that unless the PLAN NORD includes concrete proposals and solutions to the problems Nunavik Inuit currently face as a day-to-day reality in the Nunavik region, a PLAN NORD is of no value to Nunavik Inuit.

If Québec's focus is on energy, mining, forests, and tourism potentials, Makivik Corporation is deeply worried about the present social crisis in Nunavik.

SECTOR BY SECTOR PRIORITIES FOR NUNAVIK

Over the years and at multiple meetings and working conferences, the Nunavik Inuit and Inuit organizations, have thoroughly developed their priorities for the next 5 to 25 years in the following areas:

1. Housing
2. Health
3. Education
4. Access to Territory
5. Mining
6. Energy
7. Tourism
8. Bio-Food
9. Wildlife

10. Culture and Identity
11. Telecommunications
12. Community Development

CONCLUSION

PLAN NORD must respect all current treaties and agreements between the Government of Québec and Nunavik Inuit. In particular, PLAN NORD must ensure that Québec continues to implement all its obligations under the JBNQA and other agreements it signed in the recent years.

PLAN NORD does not replace Québec's obligations and undertakings under the above treaties and agreements but is simply supplementary to them.

PLAN NORD must overall take into account the long-term impacts of development in the Nunavik region on Nunavik Inuit harvesting activities.

The PLAN NORD context is not the first time in which socio-economic challenges and needs of Nunavik Inuit and the Nunavik region have been documented and submitted to Québec.

PLAN NORD must not forget that Nunavik Inuit are both an aboriginal people with treaty rights to the Nunavik region and taxpayers.

PLAN NORD process has demonstrated to us the need for up-to-date comprehensive statistical information/data specific to the Nunavik Inuit and the Nunavik region.

PLAN NORD's goal of respecting the principle of sustainable development in the development of the territory is intended in part to ensure protection in its natural state of at least 50% of the PLAN NORD territory. It is essential that Nunavik Inuit set forth their rights, needs and concerns so that the protected areas reflect these.

Given the anticipated increased activity and population in the Nunavik Region under PLAN NORD, it is now more urgent that Nunavik Inuit can participate directly in Quebec's democratic institutions, namely the Quebec National Assembly.

NUNAVIK INUIT SUPPORT TO A QUÉBEC PLAN NORD

Nunavik Inuit and the Nunavik region have set forth numerous concerns and priorities. However, if the following 7 main priority needs are not met in the short-term (3-5 years) by the PLAN NORD, Nunavik Inuit cannot and will not give any support to the PLAN NORD. This is how important these priorities are to Nunavik Inuit!

1. Housing: Québec has to commit to a catch-up program (1,000 units) and for the regular housing program for Nunavik.

2. High cost-of-living: has to be addressed on an urgent basis.

3. Essential Services: Québec has to recognize that housing, municipal infrastructure, telecommunications, municipal roads, drinking water, fire prevention, disposal of sewage and solid waste, policing and search and rescue are all essential services and the northern villages must be provided funding on this basis and not on the current ad hoc basis.

4. Health: requires substantial additional human and financial resources from Québec culturally adapted to the Nunavik Inuit.

5. Education: requires substantial additional human and financial resources from Québec culturally adapted to the Nunavik Inuit.

6. Implementation of recommendations outlined in the April 2007 report, and September 2010 follow-up report, of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse Québec, with respect to its investigation into child and youth protection services in Ungava Bay and Hudson Bay entitled: “NUNAVIK Report, Conclusions of the investigation and recommendations”.

7. Self-government for Nunavik Inuit.

We recognize that, in some cases, the solutions to the above issues cannot easily be identified and, once identified will require time, effort and funding to resolve. In other cases, the solutions are known and funding is the problem. But, if Québec is to provide benefits from the future development of the North to all Québécois, it must accept as a fundamental principle of the PLAN NORD, before anything else, that it has to invest much more to improve the standard of living of the Nunavik Inuit taxpayers inhabiting the territory why they wish to exploit for the benefit of future generations.

LAST COMMENTS

Implicit in everything what Makivik and indeed Nunavik Inuit have done in the past 30 or more years, has been ensuring that we participate as full partners and at every level in the development of our region and of our country.

In other words, we have settled our comprehensive land claims and are building the political, institutional and economic development structures necessary for us to control our own destiny within our own region.

In the last 30 years, Nunavik Inuit have developed their own VISION: to run their

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

In summary, I believe that the overall philosophy that our treaty is built upon, should apply to whatever initiatives we undertake in the future of the Arctic.