



INUIT

Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting
Okalik Egeesiak | Iqaluit, Nunavut | April 24, 2015

One Arctic: Shared Opportunities, Challenges and Responsibilities

(check against delivery)

Ullukkut, Ministers, Ambassadors, distinguished guests. I am pleased to welcome you to my home town of Iqaluit, within my capacity as the ICC International Chair.

As the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), I represent 160,000 Inuit, throughout Chukotka, Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Though a small, distinct Indigenous population, our Arctic homelands are vast. Compare our small number to that of the Arctic eight as well as the Observer states, the numbers you represent is dramatic: 3.5 billion. More important, however, is the fact that we are all here to advance our shared vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable Arctic.

Inuit are a distinct people among many Indigenous peoples. We have our own identity and history.

Our distinct voice is recognized. We have an active and well-respected role in a diverse range of international arenas, where we have been leaders in breaking new ground, advocating for Arctic-specific, indigenous-focused perspectives.

One example is the recently concluded international mercury agreement better known as the Minamata Convention. Another is the Stockholm Convention on Eliminating Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the 1990s.

It is safe to say, that we were the first to advocate for and to raise awareness about the driving forces that are changing the Arctic.

Today the Arctic is a barometer of planetary health. Activities in non-Arctic regions of the world are the primary forces driving Arctic change. Scientists' conclusions have verified climate change, transboundary pollutants, ocean acidification, demands for Arctic resources, increased shipping, adventure tourism --- all have their roots outside the Arctic.

Many of the social and economic challenges faced by Inuit today are therefore influenced by global factors. This is why ICC supports the proposed themes and projects for the USA Arctic Council Chairmanship. The themes are crucial to the Inuit and indeed, they are indivisible from our identity, way of life, and our future.

However I strongly urge that the United States chairmanship program include two critical priority areas, namely *Food Security* and *Inadequate Housing*.

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In my view, we can do more to enhance our future work and to base our respective policies and opportunities upon traditional knowledge as well as experience with sound research, appropriate messaging, and sustainable and equitable programs and services.

To be specific, the Arctic States and, especially, the Permanent Participants are the appropriate authorities to develop processes and promote sustainable products such as the beautiful sealskin that you see in this room.

We welcome appropriate economic activity that respects the natural environment and includes Inuit in ways that promote, benefit, and respect our culture, our communities and our human rights.

I look forward to working with you to make positive progress in the years to come.

After all, 160,000 Inuit plus 3.5 billion from the eight arctic states and the observer states, we, the leadership in this room, should be able to make a significant difference.

For more information see:

- *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty (2009)*
- *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat (2011)*
- *Kitigaaryuit Declaration (2014)*
- *A Meaningful & Principled Approach for Inuit Engaging Arctic Council Observers*, (Inuit Circumpolar Council, March 2015).