1. Study on the Right to Land under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Human Rights focus

By: Inuit Circumpolar Council

For thousands of years, Inuit have traversed Pikialasorsuaq to travel between Greenland and Canada. This unimpeded travel has been historically accounted by both western ethnographers like the famous Danish Knud Rasmussen and Inuit stories for example about Angakkoq Qillarsuaq. This border and region offered safe travelling routes long before the present borders were drawn and imposed upon us.

This trade and exchange took place all the way up to the year 2000’s where Inuit every year were making exchanges and trade as well as cultural events, important for Inuit and maintaining their common heritage and kinship, and harvesting activities. After new international regulations after 9/11 it was no longer possible to travel between the borders.

Inuit are brothers and sisters and consider themselves as a united, singular people. The sense of unity is fostered and celebrated by the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) which represents the Inuit of Denmark/Greenland, Canada, USA and Russia. As a people, we enjoy the rights of all Indigenous peoples, including the right to exercise self-determination over our lives, lands, territories, cultures and languages.

In November 2017, the ICC project entitled Pikialasorsuaq Commission delivered their report on the findings of the important Pikialasorsuaq area, also known as North Water Polynya, which constitutes the sea between North Greenland and Canada.

One recommendation states:

 “Establishment of a free travel zone for Inuit across the Pikialasorsuaq region.

 Inuit who live and use the Pikialasorsuaq must be recognised and respected as leaders in ensuring the protection of this area. Inuit want to ensure the viability of this important marine region for generations to come.”

We are happy that the study recognizes the successful work of ICC, which builds connections across international boundaries for cultural exchanges and political coordination.

We would like to recommend to include this issue to the study of Inuit cross-boundary problem and neglect under UN Declaration articles. 26 and 36 we have throughout all of Inuit Nunaat, which remains a stifling problem for our people across Chukotka, Alaska, Canada and Greenland.

This is especially true when it is clear that other countries have adopted free travel agreements such as the Schengen Agreement and the Canadian-US Jay Treaty, which affirms in article III that Native Americans may freely pass and repass across the borders.

Recommendation:

The recommendation is for the governments of Denmark and Greenland respect and recognize the wish from the Inuit of Pikialasorsuaq territory and the recommendation from Pikialasorsuaq Commission to address this issue and identify and implement a solution in collaboration with Canada to make a travel free zone possible for Inuit. We would then be able to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation across the borders, Denmark and Canada, in consultation and cooperation with Inuit, must measure to facilitate and ensure implementation of this recommendation, consistent with our rights as Indigenous peoples.