

Government of Nunavut observations on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of Inuit

Submission

1. The Government of Nunavut appreciates the opportunity to share its views on “the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous people” in Nunavut, Canada as requested by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its communications dated 4 November 2011. The Government of Nunavut understands that the OHCHR is seeking information on this matter, in accordance with Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 18/8, in support of the Expert Mechanism’s study, which the Mechanism will present to the HRC at its 21st session.
2. As with all languages, the indigenous languages of Canada’s newest territory, Nunavut, operate as the fundamental medium of personal and cultural expression through which Inuit knowledge, values, history, tradition and identity are transmitted. In Nunavut, the Inuit Language (comprised of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun) also carries with it a significant legal and political dialogue that represents the protection of the rights of Inuit people.
3. In particular, the Inuit Language constitutes the banner under which the indigenous people of Nunavut exercise their right, reflected in Article 5 of UNDRIP, to “maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.” The Inuit Language also acts as the vehicle through which Indigenous peoples are able to exercise their right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” pursuant to UNDRIP, Article 13.
4. Historically, the Inuit people were compelled to adopt the English language and its associated ways of colonialist thinking and valuing the world. As the English language dominated what is now the Nunavut Territory, the Inuit Language, culture and by extension, people, were marginalized. Important opportunities to develop and influence modern society were lost.
5. Since the signing of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement (NLCA) in 1993, the creation of the Nunavut Territory and its public government in 1999, the interrelated roles of the Inuit Language and Inuit culture have changed. Now, in

- addition to linking each Inuk with his or her past, present and future identity, the Inuit Language underpins the service-providing and policy-making functions of the Government of Nunavut.
6. Nunavut's Legislative Assembly enacted significant language legislation package in 2008, consisting of the *Official Languages Act*, R.S.N.W.T. 1988. C. O-1, as duplicated for Nunavut by s. 29 of the *Nunavut Act*, S.C. 1993, c.28. (Nunavut OLA) and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, S. Nu. 2008, c. 17 (Nunavut ILPA). The law provides Inuit in Nunavut with a clear statement of their inherent right to the use of the Inuit Language in full equality with English and French languages. Through these statutes, the Legislative Assembly affirmed that the Inuit Language is the engine of both reconciliation and a sustainable future for the Inuit of Nunavut.
 7. The purpose of the Nunavut OLA has been to ensure the status of the Inuit Language is equal to the other two official languages in Nunavut, namely English and French, as well as to maintain and enhance all of the rights and privileges accompany an official language status.
 8. The Nunavut OLA secures the right for Nunavummiut to communicate, and receive services, in the official language of their choice in a manner that is meaningful, culturally appropriate, and competent.
 9. The Nunavut ILPA also affirms the right of the Inuit to communicate in the Inuit Language. The statute describes the attainment of linguistic rights for Inuit in a powerful preamble : language rights are inseparable from the equality and human dignity rights of Inuit; they promote Inuit self-reliance and cultural, social and economic well-being as contemplated by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (*Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act*, S.C. 1993, c. 29), and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982* being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c. 11.
 10. Drawing both its spirit and its substance from the heart of the Inuit culture, the Nunavut ILPA affirms the Inuit language as a language of education, of work and of daily interactions between government and Nunavummiut. It authorizes public projects to revitalize the use of the Inuit Language in communities experiencing language loss. The ILPA also creates the framework to support the effective use, development and standardization of the Inuit Language in all sectors of Nunavut society.
 11. Nunavut's three official languages together represent the lens through which government represents and engages with both Inuit and non-Inuit citizens. It is the Inuit language which is most at risk if it is not sheltered and supported in daily application and use. From healthcare and education programs to public service recruitment and justice services, myriad federal and territorial governmental functions must be given effect in the Inuit Language and through the rich and time-worn cultural filters of the Inuit people.

12. In order to give legal effect to our language laws, the Government of Nunavut is developing a comprehensive implementation plan to identify and coordinate government, public and even private activities and resources which will be subject to degrees of transformation in order for our Territorial government to administer Nunavut's language legislation.

13. The development of the implementation plan for the delivery of Inuit language services to Nunavummiut will be a collaboration between the Government of Nunavut and the Inuit people, including Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), a territorial organization created under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

14. The Government of Canada has an important role to play in this significant initiative and has clearly signaled its willingness to protect, revitalize and promote Nunavut's indigenous language. Inter-governmental collaboration in planning, resourcing and implementing these cultural imperatives has been initiated and is anticipated to extend over a multi-year period, as the Government of Nunavut shepherds the course.