



The Arctic in 2045: A Long Term Vision
Okalik Eegeesiak | Wilton Park, London, UK | February 17, 2016

An Inuit Vision of the Arctic in 2045

(check against delivery)

Ullukkut,

Good afternoon. My name is Okalik Eegeesiak. First, thank you to the organizers for the invitation to speak at this conference at such a beautiful and inspiring venue and to the participants who share the value of the Arctic and its peoples. A thirty year vision for the Arctic is important. Inuit believe in a vision for the Arctic – our vision looks back and forward – guided by our past to inform our future. I hope my thoughts will add to the discussion. I will share with you about what Inuit are doing to secure our vision and how we can work together for our shared vision of the Arctic.

Inuit have occupied the circumpolar Arctic for millennia – carving a resilient and pragmatic culture from the land and sea – we have lived through famines, the little ice age, Vikings, whalers, missionaries, residential schools, successive governments and we intend to thrive with climate change.

A documentary was recently released in Canada that told of the accounts of two Inuit families and an single man from Labrador, Canada now called Nunatsiavut – these Inuit were brought to Europe in the 1880's and displayed in “zoo's”. Their remains are still in storage in museums in France and Germany and their predecessors are now working to repatriate them. I share these struggles and trauma to illustrate that we have come a long way... and I am with a solid foundation of our history. I am here to speak to you about partnership, of understanding, and of shared values as we imagine together the potential and opportunities of the Arctic through 2045. The Arctic is my Nunaat – my home – but Inuit recognize it is also a globally significant region. Important to us all.

Some believe there is a governance vacuum in the Arctic. Although, there has always been a well-organized governance regime, Inuit constantly have to remind the world, and sometimes even our respective states, that we are there. We sometimes find it daunting that so many people and so many interests from outside the Arctic have such detailed and energetic plans for

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our future and for our homeland - without our input, without our knowledge and, therefore, oftentimes without our agreement.

Inuit are an international people. As the Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), ICC gives voice to more than 160,000 Inuit in Chukotka, Alaska, Canada and Greenland and as such we engage in a variety of national fora within our individual states and multilateral fora including the Arctic Council and the United Nations at the international stage. I have just been in Brussels working towards building a shared understanding of Inuit and our role in the management of Arctic resources, our community's health, the cultural diversity and knowledge. Inuit have to offer the global community and how the global community can support the vibrant Inuit culture, our way of life and our collective vision.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Inuit Circumpolar Council: Inuit formally organized in 1977 creating the Inuit Circumpolar Conference – now the Inuit Circumpolar Council – almost 40 years ago in effect to deal with issues on environment, economic and global challenges which we saw were impacting our communities. Since then, we have dealt with many different governments—with different priorities and changing policies. Our issues have remained the same - concern for the environment, wildlife, education, and healthier communities. Basically, social and economic well-being and a vision for the betterment of Inuit and our communities.

Inuit live in four countries with four very different political realities and relationships with the state - yet we are one through our language and our culture. It is said that, "Boundaries between disciplines are largely artificial, and addressing the world's problems requires combining knowledge in new ways." This resonates with me because Inuit believe that global problems need global solutions. I would suggest that boundaries between countries and people are largely artificial and by communicating and listening and learning from each other – by combining our collective knowledge – we can find solutions to anything.

As I travel to bring the Inuit voice to the world I am constantly met with great interest in the issues the Arctic faces, in our culture and in our land. The Arctic truly has the global consciousness spellbound - those who want to use it, ship through it, explore it, mine it, and protect it. For Inuit the Arctic defines who we are – a pragmatic, hunting culture. Inuit base decisions on our indigenous knowledge of our past, of our present and of our future - a robust knowledge system based on 1,000's of years of observing, testing and passing on to the next generation or generations. So the challenge for Inuit mirrors the challenge climate change presents – the pace may outweigh our and the environment's ability to adapt.

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The Arctic and the communities are unique in nation states and between Inuit states, so our visioning exercise will be unique for different communities and the opportunities and challenges associated with Arctic change will vary significantly over time and place. Different communities face different risks from a changing Arctic and have different perspectives regarding the implications of those risks as well as the most appropriate response options. Being part of the planning, the researching, the governance of evidence based decision making will ultimately lead to more sustainable decisions in, by, for, and with Arctic communities.

There still remains uncertainties. For example, the future evolution of governance systems in the Arctic as well as global demands for energy and the exploitation of Arctic resources are based more on commodity process than on the thickness of the ice. The strength and level of cooperation among different institutions affect how well Inuit communities cope with change. The value of the Arctic Council as a governance mechanism and the role of ICC and other PP's must be strengthened. The utilization and value of our knowledge systems must be further and better employed.

Visioning the future of the Arctic can be useful for navigating the various needs of the peoples who call the Arctic home, others who share an interest in the Arctic, and for those who see profit in the Arctic. The "Vision 2045" from this meeting may well be an important interface between Arctic science and the acquisition of knowledge and local, national and circumpolar policy.

As the world looks northward for resources, shipping, fisheries – Inuit must be heard – we must be part of any decision making in our Nunaat – Inuit have wealth of knowledge to contribute to evidence based decision making. We have an established system of governance – we welcome partnerships and relationships that support our rights – as entrenched in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) - to pursue our cultural heritage. The new Canadian Liberal Government's pledge to indigenous peoples was articulated in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Ministerial mandate letters, "No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples". I add that no relationship is more important to outside parties than with Indigenous Peoples.

In many situations we are working in multilateral processes with governments, non-governmental organizations, and businesses where many other non-Arctic interests are represented. Many have agendas that they want to have validated by having Inuit involved in their work. This can take a lot of time, money and staff work to do. Resources which ICC and

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our representative organizations do not have. States are covered for operational costs and often express their desire to work with Inuit with no adequate resources attached to the desire.

It is hard to speak about the Arctic without addressing climate change. Inuit welcome the interest, the potential for jobs and training, and the economic opportunities climate change may eventually bring. But sadly, I do not see the communities I give voice to benefitting yet. Suicides rates among our young people continue to rise, mental health is a serious, underfunded and underserved health concern, life expectancy statistics for Inuit are well below any southern levels, food insecurity is increasing, graduation rates are lowering, and housing is limited and often well below any southern standards. International regulations and actions restrict our rights – to hunt species we use as food and trade in for capital. Many well-meaning people feel that they can protect the Arctic better than the Inuit who have done so for millennia.

Last December in Paris at the UN Climate talks, I led a delegation of Inuit leaders and youth to bring our voice to the international table. We worked hard to negotiate – for real action - to stabilize warming to 1.5°C rather than 2.0°C - for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the core of the Agreement, which is legally binding. However, in the end the language was included in both the preamble to the Decision Document and the Agreement and acknowledges the unique and differentiated the rights of Indigenous Peoples. ICC also advocated for financing of climate adaptation and mitigation projects and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge. Although the outcome was better than expected, the final agreement is only a global life raft.

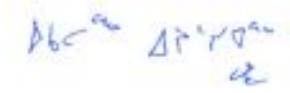
As the climate talks concluded, every major news article on the Paris agreement featured a photo of the Arctic at the same time Singapore had convened an Arctic shipping conference where they, China, India, S Korea and others noted they have an eye on opening routes across the Arctic Ocean [due to climate change], it was difficult to simultaneously watch this and see how hard it was for Inuit to make the world understand the Arctic sea ice is our Nunaat – our home – our right.

I want to leave you with three key points to consider: 1) the Arctic is not empty there is a great deal of established governance structures and environmental management regimes; 2) global interest in the Arctic is largely driven by commodity prices - if there is profit to be made no amount of ice will stop exploration; and 3) Inuit do not intend to be museum displays – we intend to continue to thrive in the changing Arctic. In closing Inuit are pragmatic we want to work with others. We will commit if we benefit socially and economically. When we commit

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and benefit, the world benefits for the betterment of the global community. Inuit with our fellow Indigenous Peoples are not stakeholders. We are the main players.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Abca' followed by some less legible characters.

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