



January 2016

Chair's Message
Inuit Voices Informing Action

Ullukkut,

January finds the Arctic in the grip of winter weather – welcomed by those of us who depend on the land and sea. The sun is coming back and the future is looking bright. The ICC Executive Council will meet in Ottawa, Canada in late January to take stock of our accomplishments to date and plan for the next six months. As I travel to bring your 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, explore it, mine it, and protect it. For Inuit the Arctic defines who we are – a pragmatic, adaptable, hunting culture.

The fall was a busy time with little time at home to watch the late winter seize the Arctic. It seems that winter comes later and later each year and leaves earlier. I brought this message of Arctic change from Reykjavik to Paris. In Reykjavik, at the Arctic Circle Conference, I gave a keynote speech “Combining Our Collective Knowledge and Making Our Voice Heard”. I addressed world leaders, industry representatives, NGO’s and indigenous peoples and shared how the Arctic is getting crowded. I expressed the need to make certain Inuit design their own futures and that our communities are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities. I also spoke at side events on issues of renewable energy systems that will save money and reduce Inuit communities’ dependence on imported fossil fuels to resource development in the Arctic.

In Paris, France at the United Nations Climate Negotiations this past December, Inuit were well represented by an ICC delegation with leaders and youth from Canada, Alaska, and Greenland. These negotiations were tremendously difficult but in the end we made progress. The real test will be holding states to the commitments made, to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, to address climate change action and affect real change in Arctic communities. The recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples was an important issue and the fact that it is in the *Paris Accord* is the result of significant effort by global Indigenous Peoples at the talks. ICC delegates also advocated for financing of climate adaptation and mitigation projects and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge. The Paris Accord states, “*Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow... and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples...*” ICC made numerous interventions on the issue of the need to stabilize global temperature increases to 1.5°C as opposed to the more globally accepted 2.0°C. The final text states that nations commit to “*...holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C.*” ICC delegates worked the halls and met with many world leaders including Indigenous Peoples leaders, the President of France, the US Secretary of the Interior and other Ministers.

Inuit Circumpolar Council – Office of the Chair

ICC remains committed to work with Canada, Greenland, Alaska and Chukotka, and the Arctic States within the Arctic Council, to meet and exceed the commitments, support indigenous communities and make certain the Arctic remains cold.

In the Chair's Strategic Plan I committed to work to advance a better understanding Inuit Mental Health and support Inuit access to mental health services. In meeting this commitment ICC has been working with Dr. Allison Crawford, an extraordinary physician and psychiatrist, who is working with us to develop the Arctic Council Rising Sun initiative and to better understand suicide in northern communities. I have just returned from Dartmouth College where I spoke at the Fulbright Arctic Initiative Consensus Seminar on Community Health and Wellness in the Arctic on Inuit Determinants of Health and Wellness and the recent climate negotiations.

ICC is now planning and preparing for the ICC Wildlife Management Summit in Kuujuaq, Nunavik during 2016. The purpose of the ICC Wildlife Management Summit is to examine policies (international, regional, national instruments), environmental change, public perceptions, and changing social economic conditions in the Arctic is having on Arctic wildlife and Inuit hunting culture, subsistence/sustainable utilization and harvesting rights. The relationship between Inuit and Arctic wildlife and these influences will be the central discussion and how indigenous knowledge is an important knowledge base for evidence-based decision making. The ICC Economic Summit will follow in the fall of 2017 in Alaska.

The ICC Office of the Chair is working with ICC Greenland to create the Pikialaorsuaq Commission. This Inuit led commission has appointed three commissioners -- myself as the International Commissioner, former Nunavut Premier, Eva Aariak as the Canadian Commissioner and former Greenland Premier, Kuupik Kleist is the Greenland Commissioner. The North Water polyna is the largest in the Northern Hemisphere and the most biologically productive ecosystem north of the Arctic Circle. It is an area that will see increasing interest from shipping, fisheries, non-renewable resource exploration/development and tourism. The Commission's mandate is to listen to Inuit community members and knowledge holders who use and depend on this region about their vision for the North Water's future use and cooperation. The Commission will begin hearings in the Canadian high Arctic early spring and travel to the Greenland communities in after breakup. The Commission report with recommendations on the future of the North Water will be released to the public in the fall of 2016.

Next month I will travel to England at the invitation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to speak to the Wilton Park Conference on "The Arctic in 2045: a long-term Vision". That is only 30 years from now -- Inuit will bring a much longer term vision to how we see Inuit Nunaat.

From Inuit, by Inuit, to Inuit, for Inuit, in Inuit Nunaat for the benefit of the global community.

Aingai.

J. Okalik Egeesiak