



Circumpolar Inuit Economic Summit
“Setting the Agenda for Our Future”

Okalik Eegeesiak | Anchorage, Alaska | March 28, 2017

An Inuit Vision for Arctic Economic Development

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Ullaakkut.

Good morning. My name is Okalik Eegeesiak. I was born and raised in Iqaluit on the shores of Frobisher Bay in the Canadian Arctic and I join with my colleague the ICC Alaska President Jim Stotts, VP Vera Metcalfe, the ICC Alaska Board, and the ICC staff to welcome you to this important event. As well, I acknowledge the Executive Council members, here with us. Herb Nakimayak, VP for Canada; Tatiana Achirgina, President from Chukotka, and Hjalmar Dahl the President of ICC Greenland. Nancy Karetak-Lindell, the ICC Canada President and Nuka Kleemann the VP from Greenland could not be here.

The economic opportunities in the Arctic is an important issue as the Arctic continues to grow in economic and geostrategic importance globally. In fact, yesterday, there was another important meeting hosted by the Wilson Centre in Washington, DC, with the theme: “The North American Arctic: Building a Vision for a Regional Collaboration.” Keynote speaker was the US Senator for Alaska, the Honourable Lisa Murkowski; Premier Peter Taptuna from Nunavut, Minister Vittus Qujaukisoq from the Greenland, Lieutenant Governor of Alaska the Honourable Byron Malott, and the MP for Yukon the Honourable Larry Bagnell all spoke to the needs and pressing challenges of today.

Economic and socio-economic development have been long standing issues and priorities for Inuit, Governments, and non-indigenous-businesses. Today, we have the people together, in this room, with the commitment, expertise, experience, resourcefulness, and the connections to build upon economic development from the Inuit perspective for Inuit by Inuit. Inuit, to a large extent, have only been able to watch outside forces directly impact our lives and to a large extent, global forces continue to negatively impact our livelihood.

For example, Inuit have experience in watching others benefiting from our innovations such as the parka in the success of the Canada Goose parka; the success of the name brand and boot of Kamik; and the world-wide use of the qayaq in sport.

On top of that, we continue to be negatively impacted by emotional, uneducated, “moral” campaigns to protect our resources such as the seal and the impact of other campaigns effecting resources such as the ivory from the walrus and from the narwhal. From inuksuit to ulus to igloos to parkas to kamiks to qayait, these are Inuit innovation we still use today. Inuit are looking to go beyond these iconic

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innovations to re-create our economies to meet the needs of a changing Arctic – an Arctic that the world is looking towards for renewable and non-renewable resources.

How do we meet our community needs and expectations with limited regional and territorial resources and competing national and international goals and objectives? We have started. We have experience. We have tenacity. We are here. Inuit own airlines. Inuit own ships. Inuit own hotels. Inuit own construction companies. We own or manage a lot of things in our communities. In our regions. In our territories and in our countries. We want to do more. So now, how do we as an international people collaborate to own international companies across borders and compete with international non-Inuit businesses...for the betterment of Inuit.

With the Arctic warming at twice the rate as the rest of the planet and melting sea ice opening up the resource-rich region to trade routes and commercial activities that use to be restricted by ice, the Arctic faces and offers both opportunities and challenges. In fact just last week the National Snow and Ice Data Center announced “once again the Arctic sea ice appears to have reached its annual maximum extent on March 7. This is the lowest maximum in the 38-year satellite record” – this impacts the economic future of our communities as global, circumpolar and Inuit companies look at the rate of ice loss as an opportunity and a challenge.

This is true of the many challenges of economic development in the Arctic - start up investment costs, lack of infrastructure, deep water ports, roads, connectivity and reliable internet access, energy and transportation costs, weather, supply chain management and a trained work force. There is a great need to develop and support opportunities for circumpolar collaboration for sustainable economies. By building strong Inuit companies and partnerships we are building and rebuilding self-determination, social, justice and economic re-empowerment for our communities and villages. It is timely to explore, talk and direct Inuit business across borders.

As Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council – an international organization with official status within the United Nations and a Permanent Participant to the Arctic Council, ICC gives voice to the 160,000 Inuit living in Canada, Greenland, Alaska and Chukotka - four different political realities. As I travel to bring the Inuit voice to the world, I am constantly met with great interest in the issues the Arctic faces. The Arctic truly has the global consciousness spellbound – those who want to use it – Inuit use it, ship through it – Inuit ship through it, explore it – Inuit live here, mine it – Inuit depend on its renewable resources, study it – Inuit monitor its changes and protect it – Inuit always have. And, perhaps invest in it – Inuit are invested in it. I feel we must consider at a minimum a thirty year “economic” vision for the Arctic – what do we hope the Arctic and our communities will look like in 2050?

The theme of the discussions over the next few days focuses on “Setting an Agenda for Our Future”. The development of the Arctic – development that will shape the Arctic into 2050. It is important to have an honest dialogue about the strengths that we can build upon and the common challenges we face, both in the Arctic and globally. As always, there are many uncertainties. Commodity prices remain low, political uncertainty remains high. I touched on some of these challenges earlier infrastructure, connectivity, human capital. How can we address these huge issues?

How do we build upon the 1993 conference “Trade and Travel; Strengthening Economic Ties; and Natural Resources and Economies” also held here. How do we lead, direct, and influence other major conferences such as yesterday’s conference in Washington that discussed collaboration for the North American Arctic?

I remind you that Inuit, as articulated in the *“Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development”*, support Arctic development – but not at any cost. It must be done right. So, what does right mean and, particularly, what does it mean within the context we face across the Arctic and the world? And, equally as important, how do we get there?

Although each Arctic country, region and community must determine this for themselves, I believe that, in short, economic development done right means equity. It means long-term sustainability. It means that economic development is not simply done for the peoples of the Arctic, it is also by the peoples of the Arctic. Finally, and maybe most importantly, it means that economics and finances do not take priority over social and cultural issues and that social issues do not in turn take priority over environmental issues. This is the cascading order of priority which has been all too often imposed upon the Arctic, our peoples.

We should look at economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges and opportunities through a single lens and deploy economic solutions that address immediate societal challenges such as food security, social development and climate change, among others. We should shift the focus, so that in addition to driving shareholder value higher and higher, we also drive community value higher and higher. What good is shareholder value if community members next to economic development projects go hungry? What good is a higher share price if Inuit determinants of social health are also not improving? Shareholder value often means less dedicated attention to equally pressing community challenges and opportunities that local people face daily.

In short, we must advocate for and create a value shift, a paradigm shift, within the Arctic economic development landscape. We must re-imagine and re-align economic development values with those of Inuit rather than simply adopting or adapting the values of western society. In addition to shareholder value, we must look to community value. Instead of individualism, we continue to drive home the collective good. It is only through this type of sustained paradigm shift that we will truly start to move the bar and recreate thriving communities. Where have we been successful in the message of the collective good versus the individual or one-business success value?

The good news is that we do not have to start from scratch. We have many tangible successes to build upon. We also have history to guide us, to ensure that our cultural values, such as benefits for the collective good, are at the core of how we move forward and, we have the innovation of community and young leaders to create and recreate value for communities through economic development.

Such one big example is of mining. With what seems to be inevitable of increased marine access to and activity in mining because of melting sea ice, Inuit are also very concerned about how it is impacting our

natural resources. The Red Dog Mine in Alaska is one of the largest zinc and lead mines in the world and is an example of how industry can contribute to the communities close to them.

Mary River Mine in Nunavut is another example of development building on the Land Claim Agreement in Nunavut to bring training and jobs to our people but also a development not without challenges. Rare earth metals may also be a lucrative industry in the Arctic and provide competition to China, which currently controls more than 40 percent of the world's rare earth reserves and still produces about 89 percent of the global rare earth elements output. Deposits in southern Greenland are top of mind when discussing rare earth metals.

However, global commodity prices, now low, will influence whether Arctic mining will be developed further. The city of Nome, for example, was founded during the Alaska gold rush, but dredging for gold has ebbed. It may be a "blessing" that low commodity prices have slowed exploration, development and extraction today. It gives us another opportunity to increase our collaboration internally as Inuit. One people divided by four borders. To build upon the ICC 1993 conference; to strengthen the "Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development; to work with our respective governments in their implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the concept of "free, informed, prior consent."

With regards to renewable resources, something Inuit tend to be very good at – no pun intended...fisheries. I know there are some challenges in this industry and I know of some of the successes. Inuit would like to expand in this field because we are succeeding and we could increase and expand with cooperation and collaboration. Inuit role in fisheries has and is expanding ownership, training and development, community development and partnerships, including social enterprise. We are reinvesting. We all have great examples and we are learning from each other.

Shifting focus to another industry where Inuit tend to excel at – again, no pun intended is tourism. Tourism has been a focal point in the media with cruise lines taking advantage of longer ice free seasons for the first time in the Northwest Passage. Tourism is not new and has long appealed to adventurers, eco tourists, hunters, or those interested in the cultural and natural beauty of the Arctic. Inuit communities have a vested interest in the appropriate development and expansion of this already successful industry as there is the potential for numerous direct economic benefits for outfitters, guides, artists and craftspeople, and indirect benefits for other businesses including the hospitality industry. The balance is ensuring that tourism benefits the communities and does not come at a cost or loss to Inuit. To do this, we must ensure that we fully maximize the benefits accrued each time an opportunity arises.

To use a more specific recent example, the Crystal Serenity successfully completed a cruise through the Northwest Passage from Anchorage to New York City in 2016 and will do so again this summer with stops in Nome, Ulukhaktok, Cambridge Bay, Pond Inlet and Ilulissat. To fully maximize the value of cruise ship tourism, however, we must work closely with partners to remove barriers. For example, the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 prevents passengers from bringing sealskin from outside of the United States because it is illegal. Yet this important legislation protects the rights of Inuit in Alaska to hunt marine mammals – a catch 22. Traditional materials, such as sealskin and ivory are used regularly by many Inuit artists – in many ways, our traditions and traditional materials are what make Inuit art and artists unique.

These are the types of barriers we must break down with partners so Inuit realize the benefits of economic development opportunities, such as tourism.

Another challenge and opportunity - climate change. A reality seen and experienced every day. As we shift to a low carbon economy, Inuit are ready to play a leadership role through innovative business models and social enterprise – models that improve heating security, or what I like to call from the average community member's perspective, affordable warmth. Models that improve our housing stock and models that result in skills training, capacity building and employment. Even within major non-renewable resource development sectors, we are seeing the integration of renewable technology in the Arctic. Glencore Raglan Mine in Nunavik, for example, has a renewable electricity smart-grid program with the use of wind power, taking into account the unique demands and constraints of the Arctic landscape as well as ongoing climate change impacts. This project is transforming the energy landscape in the Arctic. It is successfully harvesting wind energy to improve the long-term economic stability and security of the mine and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We need this type of success to be evident in our communities. Not just the mining camps.

Communications are most developed in the Nordic Arctic, next in the Russian Arctic, and least in the North American Arctic. However, private companies are beginning to build new networks in the U.S. Arctic. For example, in 2016, Quintillion, an Anchorage-based telecommunications company, began laying a repeated submarine fiber optic cable that will run through the Bering Strait and along the Alaska coast, with lines branching to Alaska cities. Iridium, a satellite communications company, provides some voice and data coverage in the Arctic region, but circumpolar communications links are still few. The development of a trans-Arctic search and rescue communications network would be an important improvement that benefits both residents and visitors. The Finnish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council has prioritized communication and connectivity.

Now is the time to re-imagine the economies of the Arctic and to be innovative. Let us create industries in the Arctic that feed our people, create energy, support our arts and culture, and sustainably take advantage of our mineral wealth. So, I look forward to discussing economic development across the Arctic and the potential of an International Inuit Business Association so, together we can make certain that in 2050, Inuit and the North are seen as global leaders in sustainable and equitable growth that truly benefits those who call it home.

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