

Agenda item 4 Discussion on the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum (economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights), with reference to the UNDRIP, the outcome document of the WCIP and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Nunavut Inuit expect to go through the formal education system in Inuktitut. Devastatingly, our own Government of Nunavut claims that Inuit do not have a right to language within education.

Over 70% of Inuit youth are dropping out of school, or rather, being pushed out, due to a formal education system that is based on a foreign language and culture. Inuit students, who make up 94% of the student population, are denied equal opportunity to education in our own language and culture.

Inuit make up the majority population of 82% in Nunavut, and Inuktitut is homogeneously the majority mother-tongue language.

In 1976, when Inuit negotiators tabled a proposal for the creation of a Nunavut Territory, the most important strategic objective was political self-determination. As one of our leaders, John Amagoalik explained, “our intent was simple: the survival of our people, our language, our heritage, our philosophy—our whole way of life.”

With the signing of the Nunavut Agreement in 1993, which resulted in the creation of Nunavut, with its own Legislative Assembly and public government there was great hope. Inuit envisioned that now, there would be a government that would include Inuit participation in the development of social and cultural policies, programs and services, including the method of their delivery. For education, Inuit expected that government would deliver Inuktitut-language education, as a foundation for achieving Inuit economic, social, and cultural well-being, including producing an Inuktitut-speaking workforce.

Instead, in 2020, the Government of Nunavut passed legislation that drastically reduced the legal provision of Inuktitut language of instruction within our schools. It reduced its commitment to full Inuktitut education in all subjects and grades, to one elective Inuktitut language course.

The legislation violates constitutionally protected equality rights of Nunavut Inuit guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In October 2021, Nunavut Tunngavik launched a case asserting the right of Inuit students to receive equal treatment in education in Inuktitut. Earlier this month, the Government of Nunavut filed a motion to dismiss our case, alleging that the only language education rights in Canada belong to English and French speaking people under the Charter, and that Inuit do not have a right to language within education.

Allow me to remind you that Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada, where homogeneously the majority public mother-tongue language is neither of Canada’s official languages of English or French.

As 2022 marks the start of the United Nation’s International Decade of Indigenous Languages, I call upon the Government of Canada to recognize Inuktitut as an official and founding language of Canada in Nunavut, so that our language, Inuktitut, is afforded equitable efforts and resources of that provided to English and French languages in Nunavut.

This concludes my remarks. Thank you for the opportunity.

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