

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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**Inuit Circumpolar Conference
Intervention
Economic and Social Development**

Good day. My name is Sheila Watt-Cloutier. I am the Chairperson of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. I am very pleased to be here in New York to address the second session of the Permanent Forum.

For 25 years ICC has been immersed in many issues that affect our circumpolar world—environmental contaminants, climate change, human rights, education, economic development, international development and trade, among others. In all of this, we promote development that is socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable.

Countries and peoples all over the world are looking for ways and means of making economic development environmentally and socially sustainable. In this quest, as

other Indigenous People, Inuit can help enlighten the world. We have, after all, the experience of actually having lived sustainably.

As Inuit, we think in holistic ways. We know that everything is interrelated—the threads of our lives are woven into a garment that is inherently sustainable. Our culture reflects our values, spirit, economy, and health. Our land and natural resources sustain us, and the health of these resources affects our health. If we use and develop these resources with respect, our environment will remain healthy and so will we. The process of the hunt is invaluable; through it we learn what is required to survive and how to gain wisdom--the key to living and acting sustainably.

Unlike many, we do not look at the economy as separate from all other aspects of our lives. Perhaps, it is because of this that we have often been portrayed in the Western media as a 'primitive' people living in a harsh and forbidding climate.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Inuit society has long pre-dated the current and latest mode of Western civilization. We already had a thriving culture when the industrial revolution transformed Western society from a social society into an economic society. Inuit have always had and continue to have a vibrant economy. Our economy, however, has remained imbedded in all aspects of our society. It has not dominated our pursuit of happiness and well-being. Inuit have lived by the hunt and have not yet solely lost themselves in pursuit of the almighty dollar.

That being said, Inuit are not immune to the successes of the modern economy. Inuit do not strive to go back to some kind of golden age where we were left alone. We embrace the future and we are a practical people. Our elders led very difficult lives and they are the first to encourage us to make use of these 'new' ways in order to bring security for our families and our communities.

However, our elders also warn us not to forget that we are Inuit.

This has not been easy. The impacts of global economic forces on Inuit are telling. High rates of suicides, alcohol and substance abuse, and spousal violence reflect the pressures upon our way of life. In the rapid transformation of Inuit society as it encounters the global economy, many of our Youth are losing their way. Not all are willing to throw themselves into the wage economy, yet they know they cannot go back to live as our ancestors did but a few generations ago.

I will illustrate this point by describing the global pressures that have been brought to bear on the age-old relationship between Inuit and the seal.

Inuit have always respectfully hunted seals for food, clothing, shelter and the well-being that is brought by sharing.

Recently, however, this relationship has been affected by external events. The health of the seal is, in part,

determined by global environmental factors including climate change and contaminants. Hunting the seal is hindered as a result of climate change. Eating the seal is questioned because of the contaminants it contains. Some governments refuse to import sealskins and other marine mammal products, depriving hunters of cash they need to buy equipment to go hunting in the first place. These external events erode our relationship with the seal, threaten our relationship with the land, and devalue a proven path to wisdom and sustainability.

The seal is being pushed to the periphery of our life. We need to bring it back to the center. Traditional ways of making a living should be preserved as an element of local economies. As Inuit seek to continue the development of our communities, we look to find ways to support and expand this economy. But we will not develop our economies at the expense of our communities and individuals. Our economic development will be synonymous with human development.

To do so, however, we must surmount many barriers. For instance, we must secure international instruments that promote the trade that is compatible with our way of life. To date our economy has been marginalized by international trade instruments like the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species and the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, both of which have decimated Inuit exports over the last decade.

We, Indigenous People, have played an important role to in the development of environmental and human rights instruments over the last decade. These steps forward will result in failure if we do not exert similar influence in the development of international trade agreements be they global, regional or bi-lateral. We must sit at the negotiation tables of the World Trade Organization. Our concerns must be heard by the negotiators of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas.

Inuit have much to offer the world but we must protect ourselves from exploitation. We must insist that our traditional knowledge and our designs are protected from

abuse. Just because we do not fit the mold of a multinational corporation does not mean that we deserve any less the protection of international law from incursions against the products of our civilization.

Circumpolar Inuit may not be great in numbers, but we have repeatedly proven that we are a barometer of the impacts of global activity. It is critical for our planet that we, Inuit, persuade the global community to heed what the barometer is saying. The Arctic is one place that connects us all. At the North Pole lines of longitude begin, grow, and extend South through every nation of the planet. In fact, the Arctic Ocean is where the world unites.

We must continue to protect our economy from devastating influences such as global warming and long range transport of persistent organic pollutants. After all, Inuit will not be able to build on our traditional economy if that economy is swept out from under us.

If Inuit are to develop an economy with a purpose, a 'societal economy', we can no longer allow ourselves not

to have an effect on global economic forces. We can no longer be excluded from much of the policy making and planning that would enable us to fully develop the potential of circumpolar trade.

Inuit, and all Indigenous People, must become active and influential participants in the development of international economic institutions and instruments that regulate the global economic forces. Indigenous human development must prepare people for global culture access and participation -- not just local, and not just national

In order to do so, we must have power to influence the global forces that would destroy our way of life. As Inuit, we have had much success in achieving some degree of political autonomy in Greenland and in Canada. But we must ask ourselves what is the value of that political autonomy if we have no control over how we are affected by the global economy.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you.