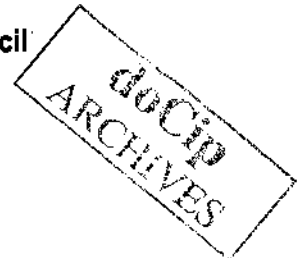


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**Group intervention by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Saami Council**



**Item 4 (f) Education: The Holistic, Indigenous Way  
A Circumpolar Perspective**

an intervention by  
Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference  
to the  
Third Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Good day. This is a joint intervention by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Saami Council. My name is Sheila Watt-Cloutier. I am the Chairperson of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). I am very pleased to be here in New York to address the third session of the Permanent Forum on the issue of education. For many years ICC and the Saami Council have been immersed in many issues that affect our circumpolar world—environmental contaminants, climate change, human rights, and education, among others. I myself have been at the frontlines of the debate about how to make institutional education relevant to the Inuit of my homeland. To attempt to make the education systems holistic, the indigenous way and connect to the real challenges that we face.

For Indigenous Peoples to understand the world beyond our homelands, the western-European model of institutionalized education is necessary. Such education does not serve us in a holistic manner but it does allow us insight into the greater world around us. It also permits us to benefit from the many developments of the modern world. The Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic need to learn how to be doctors, nurses, dentist, lawyers, computer specialists, plumbers, architects, etc., etc., etc. And for this we have come to rely on the institutional model of education.

Implementing this model of education has many challenges in the circumpolar North. The challenges range from overcoming our remote geography to creating culturally appropriate *curricula*.

**Connecting Through Technology**

Remote geography is a challenge in the circumpolar world. However, technology holds great promise to surmount this challenge. Long-distance learning technology, web-based education programs and video-conferencing have all played a role in making our isolated communities less remote.

A good illustration is the University of the Arctic, which is a cooperative network of universities, colleges, and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the North. The members of the cooperative share resources, facilities, and expertise to build post-secondary education programs that are relevant and accessible to northern students. The University of the Arctic, although it is still in its early days, is a model that holds much promise for surmounting the barriers of access to education.

The ICC and the Saami Council suggest that the Permanent Forum adopt the following recommendation:  
The Permanent Forum, recognizing the promise that new technologies hold for education in remote places, recommends that the World Summit on the Information Society ensure continued full and effective indigenous participation in the next phase of the World Summit on the Information Society upcoming in Tunis, in 2005. Permanent Forum recommends that the World Summit on the Information Society gather and analyze the indigenous media experience prior to the next summit in 2005.

**Culturally Appropriate Indigenous *Curricula***

Other challenges are not so straightforward to overcome. In our homelands, the delivery of relevant school programs in our own languages is still very limited. Further, most education programs remain approximations of

southern *curricula*. Such education programs do not serve us well. One need only look to our unacceptably high suicide rates to know that our education systems are not very effective in preparing our youth for the challenges and opportunities of life.

Our culture and way-of-life cannot easily be squeezed into the boxes that institutionalized education demands. While it is clear that we cannot completely forego institutionalized education, it is also clear that we cannot completely give ourselves over to it:

"In our Inuit heritage, learning and living were the same thing, and knowledge, judgment and skill could never be separated. In institutional life these things are frequently pulled apart and never reassembled. For example, schools spend much of their energy teaching and testing knowledge, yet knowledge by itself does not lead to wisdom, independence or power." (Nunavik Educational Task Force, 1992).

Developing appropriate *curricula* is complex. It is much more than "putting a harpoon and an Inuk in a book." (Nunavik Educational Task Force, 1992). We need the resources to create modern circumpolar societies where we still are able to learn from *our past* and from the land. "When the teacher is the land, patience and wisdom go together ... Things can usually be figured out in time, as long as one is a careful observer." (Nunavik Educational Task Force, 1992)

Do not mistake living on the land with simply acquiring hunting skills. Living on the land means acquiring many of the skills needed to survive in a turbulent modern world: patience, observation skills, control over one's physical reactions and one's emotions, the ability to be bold under pressure, the ability to develop strategy and to efficiently execute it.

These are the skills that the land teaches us. These are also the skills that we, Inuit and Saami, need to make our way in the turbulent modern world.

The Permanent Forum has – at previous sessions recommended that UNESCO and other relevant UN system organizations provide more funds to help Indigenous Peoples to education – particularly emphasizing the importance of bilingual and in intercultural training for indigenous persons and the revitalization of diminishing indigenous languages.

The Permanent Forum has further recommended that UNESCO holds a world forum on Indigenous Peoples and education that would contribute, e.g., to enriching the indigenous education concepts and pedagogical practices. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Saami Council find these recommendations very adequate, and therefore

**Suggest that "the Permanent Forum recommends that UNESCO and other relevant UN system organizations provide more funds to help Indigenous Peoples in bilingual and inter-cultural educations".**

**"The Permanent Forum recommends that UNESCO hold a world forum on education and Indigenous Peoples, with the aim e.g. to enrich and increase the understanding of, and respect for, indigenous education concepts and pedagogical practices".**

I thank you for attention.