

**STATEMENT BY
THE GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES'
HALF-DAY DISCUSSION ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

Agenda Item 7

Delivered by:

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Implementing the Dream:

Our Made-in-Nunavut Language Legislation

Introduction

Ullukkut, I'm pleased to be here today to share with you our accomplishments regarding our Inuit Language efforts in Nunavut. As we are all aware, the year 2008 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Languages, this is relevant to Nunavut as in our territory, we as a government are close to realizing the dream of the people of Nunavut, which is to not only protect but entrench through legislative instruments, the Inuit language.

The Government of Nunavut came into being on April 1, 1999 with the creation of the new Nunavut Territory. This government and territory was born from the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement which is the largest land claim settlement ever reached between a state and its Aboriginal people anywhere in the world.

The Government of Nunavut as a new government inherited legislation from the Government of the Northwest Territories, legislation such as the *Official Languages Act* which was not designed for the unique needs of Nunavummiut. Therefore, one of the mandates of the government was to design new legislation that recognizes Inuit Language.

Our new legislation; Bill 6, the *Official Languages Act* and Bill 7, the *Inuit Languages Protection Act*; are the result of one of the most extensive consultation processes undertaken since the creation of our territory. This work has involved Legislative committees, Inuit organizations, francophone organizations, municipal governments, businesses, federal authorities, education authorities and the public.

What is the language legislation all about?

Language is at the centre of our existence as Nunavummiut. It speaks of who we are and who our people are. Our language is with us when we are awake and in our dreams. It is how we communicate with our community, with elders and our children. It is how we want to communicate with our children for generations to come. It is an essential part of what makes us Inuit.

The two bills are now before the Nunavut Legislative Assembly are key elements in the plan to preserve, protect, and enhance the use of the Inuit Language.

What will Bill 6, the *Official Languages Act* do?

When the *Official Languages Act* is brought into force, it will establish the Inuit Language, along with English and French, as Official Languages of Nunavut. For the first time, Inuit in Nunavut will have a legal statement of their inherent right to use the Inuit Language in full equality with other Official Languages, which is consistent with international instruments, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, proclaimed by the United Nations. This exceeds any other legal protection in place for any other Aboriginal group in Canada.

Bill 6, the *Official Languages Act* will:

- establish the Inuit Language, with English and French as Nunavut's Official Languages;
- affirm, protect and promote aboriginal rights as per Canada's Constitution;
- respect the existing rights of English and French speakers;
- guarantee the right to use any Official Language during the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut;
- authorize Inuit Language translations of Acts and regulations;
- guarantee the right of persons in court to participate in their Official Language of choice;
- ensure that public signs and documents published by the Government are in the Official languages.

What will Bill 7 the *Inuit Languages Protection Act* do?

The *Inuit Language Protection Act* will provide the most important elements to ensure that Inuit Language is at the centre of work, education, and daily life in Nunavut.

The *Inuit Language Protection Act* will also exceed any other legal protection in place for any Inuit or other Aboriginal people of Canada. This legislation is very powerful and will have the same status as the *Nunavut Human Rights Act* and the *Charter of the French Language* in Quebec. That means the status of these laws will be higher than other ordinary laws and cannot be reduced, avoided or repealed other than by the Legislative Assembly. These laws must always be interpreted in a manner consistent with the objectives of protection and promotion of Inuit Language.

Bill 7, the *Inuit Languages Protection Act* will:

- ensure that federal agencies, municipalities, businesses, or community organizations offer Inuit Language services to the public, including signage, posters, advertising, reception and customer services;
- require Inuit Language communication with the public regarding essential, household, residential, and hospitality services;
- guarantee the right to instruction in the Inuit Language, and support measures that will produce high-school graduates fully proficient in the Inuit Language;

- identify language revitalization as an implementation priority, especially in communities and age groups experiencing language loss;
- require additional early childhood and adult education programs, materials and resources in the Inuit Language;
- affirm the Inuit Language as a language of work in the Government of Nunavut public service and support Inuit Language hiring policies and training;
- establish the Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtit, an expert body working to develop and standardize Inuit Language terms, and to expand the scope of activities where the Inuit Language can be used in modern government and business.

The Government of Nunavut and indeed Nunavummiut are proud of the work done to date in our territory in our efforts to not only protect but to promote our Inuit Language and to this end we are willing participants on the world stage to show Indigenous peoples what we have learned in our journey to achieve a unique foothold in the area of indigenous language protection.

To get copies or more information on Bill 6, the Official Languages Act, and Bill 7, the Inuit Language Protection Act, please contact:

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