



## *Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association*

Ullukkut! Good afternoon. Thank you, Sandra Ginnish, for the kind introduction. Our President Veronica Dewar sends greetings from Iqaluit, where she is attending to another important Pauktuutit commitment.

I am delighted to participate in this important forum - to share some perspectives of Inuit women – heads of families and leaders of communities, mothers, girls, grandmothers and great grandmothers, teachers, caregivers and health providers - Inuit women have ancient wisdom, traditional knowledge and practical expertise to share - they truly are agents of change in Canada's north.

To begin, I will tell you a little about Pauktuutit and a few of the many issues that face Inuit women, their children, Elders and communities – I'll touch on some of the ways Pauktuutit is responding to these challenges, some policy areas that seem to be no ones priority, and finally, I'll offer an idea or two about where we might do better.

**Veronica Dewar, President,  
Pauktuutit Inuit Women's  
Association:**

Born and raised in Coral Harbour, Southampton Island, Veronica Dewar was one of the first graduates of the GNWT's Department of Justice Legal Court Interpreting Program, where she won an award for role playing. Ms. Dewar has over 20 years of experience in interpreting and translation and she owned, managed and operated a retail clothing and n interpreting/ translating business in Rankin Inlet, NWT, until her appointment as President of Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association of Canada in April 1998.

First, what is Pauktuutit? Back in the early eighties, Inuit women from across the North gathered to consider how to address their deplorable social conditions – a growing set of harsh inequities and appalling health challenges that few others were interested in even discussing. Knowing instinctively that they'd have to become their own agents of change, by 1984 they succeeded in incorporating Pauktuutit, a new non-profit organization with a charitable trust, representing all Canadian Inuit women, to tackle on a national level what were then known as 'women's issues'.

Led by a small, dedicated staff located in Ottawa, the seat of Canada's National Government, and directed by a highly motivated Board of Directors - thirteen Inuit women comprised of a youth representative, a non-northern representative, and women elected from regions that take in

all 52 communities across the north, Pauktuutit is committed to bringing about political and social improvements, to foster awareness of the needs of Inuit women, and to encourage their community, regional and national participation in relation to social, cultural and economic development.

Gender equity, many forms of abuse, protection of cultural and traditional knowledge, unique northern environmental sensitivities and economic self-sufficiency are among our priority issues. On the health side, long term advocacy and program work has made progress on substance abuse, HIV/AIDS/Hep-C, diabetes, tobacco cessation, suicide prevention and respite for care-givers, to name just a few of our active concerns. And

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since women hold in their hands our most vulnerable citizens and our hope for tomorrow, Pauktuutit has always emphasized the well-being of children in our work. SIDS, traditional midwifery, maternal and infant care and pre-natal programs, children in care, teen pregnancy, youth suicide, FASD, and child sexual assault are among our child-related programs.

So that's Pauktuutit in a thimble... With these few minutes to speak, let me provide a little context for some of the many alarming circumstances that face Inuit women.

The majority of Inuit in Canada live in 52 remote Arctic communities extending thousands of kilometres from the Alaskan border in the west to the eastern shores of Labrador. This vast cultural and geographical heritage will very soon be in the hands of our precious youth. Between 1996 and 2001, Canadian Inuit experienced a population growth rate of 12 per cent – this is four times the rate of the non-Aboriginal population. Inuit now have an average age of just 20 years, compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians, who have an average age of 38 years.

So any constructive discussion of the needs of Inuit women must start when they are children and include a focus on the needs of mostly very young, inexperienced single mothers.

Historically, very young mothers bearing children was a normal and acceptable practice in Inuit culture. A young mother would have had a husband and a number of close relatives in a small camp to guide and assist her. Gender roles were defined and formal schooling wasn't in the picture. Today, most of these young women do not have the assistance of a partner, and their extended families are either elsewhere, or stressed by their own inadequate and often destructive social and economic conditions - conditions that place Inuit at the extremes of Statistics Canada's indicators: highest rates of unemployment, lowest income, highest cost of living, worst housing conditions, highest rates of communicable diseases, and shortest life expectancy of all Canadians.

We know that as to number, quality and effectiveness, services to Inuit women and related supports to their children do not yet even approach services provided to Canadians as a whole. Evidence of the negative effects of this inequity is all around us – and the situation is growing more complex and urgent in several

**SHEILA WATT-CLOUTIER**, from Kuujjuaq in the Nunavik region of northern Quebec, has brought international recognition to the effects the world's relentless development has had on the Arctic regions. She has fought to obtain international treaties to curtail the spread of persistent organic pollutants to her homeland. As well, she brings to the world's attention the devastating consequences of global climate change on the north. Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), Ms. Watt-Cloutier received the 2004 National Aboriginal Achievement Award. In 2002, Ms. Watt-Cloutier received an inaugural environmental award from the Washington, DC-based World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations for her global work on Environment.

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interrelated areas. I'll list a few – these will resonate with many here, as they closely parallel the items on the agenda for other sessions at this forum:

Housing - there is an on-going and severely under-addressed crisis in social housing for

Born in Churchill Manitoba, **SUSAN AGLUKARK** has many musical accomplishments. In 1993, *Maclean's Magazine* named Susan on of "Canada's 100 Leaders to Watch For"; as well, *Up Here Magazine* named her "Northerner Of The Year". Susan has performed twice for HRH Queen Elizabeth.

In addition to these professional achievements, Susan is the official Spokesperson for the North West Territories - Economic Development & Tourism/Arts & Crafts, as well as the National Spokesperson for the Aboriginal Division of the National Alcohol and Drug Prevention Programme. She also represented Canadian Inuit at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

Inuit, causing growing numbers of Inuit women to continue to be disadvantaged in ways that impact them throughout their lives.

Early childhood programs – Pauktuutit is committed to initiatives that provide Inuit day care and Aboriginal Head Start programs. While these are successful in many communities, access is spotty and many Inuit children have yet to benefit. More subsidized day care spaces would help young mothers continue with their education. This in turn would be a first-rate investment in the future of our communities and our country, as the evidence is clear - educating young mothers increases healthy baby outcomes.

Abuse - Pauktuutit has been addressing family violence issues since its inception in 1984. Our success in partnering with governments to make prevention in this area a priority and to provide services to victims is increasing, but programs remain for the most part marginal. There are a few safe shelters helping to protect women and children scattered across the Inuit regions, however the root causes of violence remain largely unaddressed, mainly because resources to address them continue to be appallingly inadequate.

Most Inuit women witness violence in their homes, too many are victims of violence themselves, and everyone in this room is aware of the negative impact that violence has on children's physical and emotional well-being, their ability to learn and their potential to grow into healthy, stable and productive adults. A significant financial investment in community-based programs and the human resources to carry them out is essential to help these women and children heal and to protect all from future abuse.

City women: The needs of Inuit women in urban areas are also of concern. More than one in ten Inuit now live in the south. Canada's urban Inuit population is expanding rapidly for a variety of reasons that include greater access to education for children and young adults, employment opportunities, and access to comprehensive medical care. And sadly, many Inuit women move south to escape family violence and abuse. There are services run by Inuit for Inuit in Ottawa, including much needed family and children's services. While these Ottawa services are useful and increasing, other urban centres are at earlier stages of organizing and most are without such culturally relevant programs.

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Another far reaching priority area of concern for Pauktuutit is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), now affecting three generations of Inuit and approaching epidemic levels. As we promote FASD awareness and prevention, the need for services for those affected by FASD becomes ever more urgent. Currently, in most cases, these problems cannot even be diagnosed, due to the absence of professional help. Without diagnosis, there is inadequate data to justify to governments the urgent need for services. If these citizens are to reach their potential, adequate program delivery and training of caregivers remain major issues to be resolved.

Unparalleled rate of change: It would be difficult to overstate the effect on Inuit women of the fact of their culture changing in less than fifty years from an isolated, family-centred economy, based on subsistence hunting and seasonal relocation, through fractured family structures and children taken far away and educated in a foreign language and culture, to population migration from small communities to regional centres and an economy of wage earning employment and life in permanent housing.

**Mary Simon** was until this year the Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade since 1994. She was the Canadian Ambassador to Denmark (1999-2001), a member of the Joint Public Advisory Committee of NAFTA's Commission on Environmental Cooperation (1997-2000) and the Chancellor of Trent University (1995 to 1999). In 2001, she was appointed Councillor for the International Council for Conflict Resolution with the Carter Center. Ms. Simon has devoted her life's work towards gaining recognition of Aboriginal rights and to promoting the study of Northern affairs. She has been awarded the National Order of Quebec, the Gold Order of Greenland, the National Aboriginal Achievement Award and the Gold Medal of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. She is a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America and of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society. She has received honorary doctorate of law degrees from both McGill and Queen's Universities.

On all these matters – housing, social services, health issues, parenting and especially the impact on Inuit of unparalleled social change, it is disheartening that Inuit are, as mentioned above, at the extremes of Statistics Canada's indicators. Let me underscore a point about connectivity that we all now know, but that bears highlighting here - we can no longer try to improve health without looking also at housing, nor can we look at education without including culture sensitivity, or at economic development without considering environmental protection. I'll come back to this point in my recommendations.

If Pauktuutit and our partners in government are to identify effective opportunities for beneficial legislative, public policy and program intervention, we must get Inuit women higher on the radar of policy-makers, funders and advocates - raise awareness within Canada and across the world, about these little-known and no longer acceptable social and economic conditions in the north.

As the world becomes ever more interconnected, I am hopeful that this and other forums will not only identify common challenges, discuss and share promising practices, but will

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also increase its resolve to provide strong and effective advocacy for women on the international stage.

In closing, I thank Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Canadian Heritage for inviting Pauktuutit and affording the opportunity to come and speak with you. I congratulate the coordinating committee of this panel discussion for the very rich program you have put together. It represents a vigorous commitment to address the women's inequities that are becoming so consequential – around the world and Canada's north.

I mentioned at the start that as heads of families and leaders of communities, Inuit women have much profound wisdom, traditional knowledge and practical expertise to share. If the spirit is celebrated and nurtured in equity, the women will thrive. If the women thrive, the men, children, Elders, and community will too.

Quyanamiik, thank you.

**PLEASE SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON FOLLOWING PAGES.....**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**I. FIRST, WE NEED GOOD SCIENCE, GOOD DATA**

Careful, Inuit-specific, systematic research will establish baselines and demonstrate undeniably how recent radical changes in living conditions and lifestyle are affecting Inuit well-being. And it will identify opportunities for constructive legislative and practical program and policy intervention. We need disaggregated data on Inuit Canadians – whose unique cultural traditions, geography, ecology and perspective are often lost in broader aboriginal statistics. This sound statistical confirmation will validate accounts of the critical social, economic, environmental and health circumstances facing Inuit and especially Inuit women, and demonstrate undeniably how dangerous and consequential a ‘business as usual’ approach would be.

**II. INUIT SPECIFIC STRATEGY**

Inuit have always had a strong relationship with Canada's northern lands, with the sea, with the animals we rely on and with our families... It is heartening to know that our Canadian government is committed to strengthening its relationship with Inuit as well, as evidenced May 19<sup>th</sup> when Prime Minister Paul Martin announced that an Inuit specific Secretariat will be established within the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Pauktuutit has worked with partner Inuit organizations for years (and negotiated several draft plans in the process) to encourage the Government of Canada to adopt a holistic, interdepartmental, Inuit Specific Strategy to reflect and support the unique culture, geography and living conditions of Canada's north. We can no longer try to improve health without looking also at housing, nor can we look at education without including culture sensitivity, or at economic development without considering environmental protection. In the light of the growing, and some would say, critical stresses on our social, economic, environmental, and family structure, we strongly implore the Government to collaborate with us and our colleague national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) to complete and implement this broad, holistic Inuit Action Plan, as a cornerstone of the new Inuit Secretariat.

**III. RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT FOR CANADA'S INDEPENDENT INUIT WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION, AND GENDER PARITY IN POLICY-MAKING**

Background: It is the appalling truth that back in the economic atmosphere of the 1990s, Inuit women's voices were diminished, marginalized, even silenced, through vastly disproportionate cuts to funding from all sources, and especially from government. This amounted to dangerous discrimination against not only women, but our children and Elders - the most vulnerable among us.

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The last decade has been a huge disappointment for anyone looking for gender parity in policy development and this includes Pauktuutit. Canada has been losing ground with women running for office and with women in leadership, across the board. In the case of the Inuit, the Government of Canada has yet to even recognize Pauktuutit, the independent voice of Inuit women, as an official National Aboriginal Organization, although we celebrate twenty years of success this year. This has clearly caused losses for the advancement of Inuit women's equality – both in the policy decision-making and subsequent resource sharing that is negotiated in our absence. We know the Government is on record as supporting more women in capacity-building and decision making positions. Now we need to see strong evidence of this commitment.

Inuit women formed Pauktuutit to empower Inuit women and their families, and to reinforce to others the moral imperative of equality in all areas of human activity - and the injustice that results without it. Since that time, we have broken the silence on painful and personal issues such as violence, suicide, addictions and child sexual abuse. Now, after years of success among Inuit women and their communities, the massive cuts to Pauktuutit's core and program funding in the 1990s have seriously diminished our capacity to fulfill this crucial mandate.

If we are to begin to re-address the slippage that has occurred, it is imperative that the Government of Canada recognize at the highest levels that Pauktuutit is indeed a truly independent national aboriginal organization. Further, Pauktuutit requires adequate, stable, multi-year funding and accountability, that is reflective of Canada's commitment to the principle of equality and that also recognizes the urgency of the current realities facing Inuit women, their children, Elders and communities.

**RECOMMENDATION: Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association: It is time for the Government of Canada to formally recognize the grass roots mandate, twenty-year program track record, and positive international reputation of this independent voice of Canadian Inuit women by:**

- Highest political level official recognition of the Association as a National Aboriginal Organization;
- Sufficient, multi-year core financial support to enable adequate human resources development and the corporate activities required to canvas, to respond, to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate urgently needed programs, to build capacity, to train, to facilitate networking – in other words, to effectively represent and express the independent voice of Inuit women within and among the isolated communities across the vast thousands of kilometres of Canada's north;
- Welcoming this women's voice as a partner at public service and political decision-making tables where issues of concern, relevance and/or consequence to Inuit women are being considered, especially, but not exclusively the FPTA tables, NAHO, Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Foreign Affairs Canada, Status of Women Canada and especially the development and implementation of the new INAC Inuit Secretariat;

**IV. INVEST IN YOUTH**

As mentioned above Inuit now have an average age of just 20 years. We must invest our time, resources and energy in our children and youth. We must make it a priority to help young Inuit to provide them with basic safety, health and social services, and access to educational choices that are meaningful to them, especially our young women. It is both well known and well documented throughout the world that when mothers are educated, outcomes for children's health improve. A strong, renewed relationship between Inuit and the Government of Canada depends literally on how today's youth are supported, mentored, educated, and respected.

**V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – INVEST POLITICALLY AND FINANCIALLY IN:**

- An intensive implementation phase for '*Journey to Success*' – the wonderful new INAC tool designed to help women become economically self sufficient;
- Income generating activities - implement capacity-building projects to encourage and support gender equity in (e.g.) arts and crafts production, fishing, environmental protection and sustainable economic development, tourism, and resource development;
- The provision, training, application, servicing and dissemination of leading edge wireless communications technologies - for women in each of the 52 Inuit communities across Canada's north;
- The necessary human, political and financial resources to ensure a positive outcome on the issue of Inuit women's traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights.