



Commissioner's Address

*At the Opening of the Fourth Session of the
Second Legislative Assembly of Nunavut*

Delivered by:

**THE HONOURABLE ANN MEEKITJUK HANSON
COMMISSIONER OF NUNAVUT**

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Unnusakkut, Innait, Uqaqtitsiji, Sivuliqti, Maligaliuqtiit ammalu Nunavummiut, bienvenue, welcome to the Fourth Session of the Second Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

It is a great privilege for me to once again preside over the opening of a new session.

As we start this session, it is with great pride that I'd like to acknowledge our 60 Team Nunavut members who have been participating in the Canada Winter Games. I look forward to traveling to Whitehorse, Yukon to join Team Nunavut for the closing ceremonies next Saturday, March 10.

Another 80 Nunavummiut including youth ambassadors, visual artists and performing artists, are also at the games.

This is the largest contingent that Nunavut has sent to a Canada Winter Games. They have done well and I wish them all a safe journey home.

I would also like to recognize Sheila Watt-Cloutier the former head of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference who was nominated for a Nobel Prize for her work highlighting how climate change is affecting Nunavut and the Arctic circumpolar regions.

Another person I want to mention is retired Anglican Minister Mike Gardiner, who was recently appointed by the Governor General as a member of the Order of Canada. The appointment recognizes his decades of service in the eastern Arctic.

These are all dedicated individuals who have worked very hard to get to where they are.

I admire their commitment to our culture our people and our territory.

Nunavut has been in existence for eight years. This is but a blink of an eye in the history of the Inuit. In these eight short years, we have had many successes -- but many challenges remain.

Prevention of Violence

One such challenge is the high rate of family violence.

All families deserve to live free of violence. Making our communities safe requires the commitment of everyone. We need Nunavummiut and communities to work together because caring communities are healthy communities.

It is in this spirit that the Legislature passed the *Family Abuse Intervention Act*.

This year the government will focus on its implementation. The implementation strategy will include community training for elders, frontline workers, justices of the peace, police officers and counselors.

One of the goals of the Act is to address the high level of family violence by providing the legal tools and resources to prevent all types of abuse – including financial and mental abuse of elders – at its roots.

The legislation includes provisions for traditional counseling for all parties involved. There are also provisions for emergency protection orders, and community intervention orders.

The Act supports solutions to violence based on the values of the community and includes an active role for elders.

The government will also rely on community resources for delivery of programming to residents of the new correction facility to be built in Rankin Inlet.

Programming will be provided closer to home, including at outpost camps that will be established in the Kivalliq.

Counselors already working in their community will be able to assist offenders in an effort to heal Nunavut families.

Building Nunavut

At times the challenges seem large but so is our resolve.

The first government of Nunavut set out goals for the development of the territory. The government imagined what life in Nunavut could be like in 2020. It outlined four goals – healthy communities, simplicity and unity, self reliance and continuing learning.

As members of the second Legislature you reviewed the goals and evaluated progress achieved between 1999 and 2004. This work resulted in *Pinasuaqtavut 2004-2009*, which is the current mandate document.

In addition to the four goals, *Pinasuaqtavut* sets out two priorities for your term: building a stronger culture based on Inuit societal values and developing and expanding our economy.

More than half of your term has been completed and in the months ahead the government will continue to focus on culture, language, education, and the economy.

Culture and Language

This government is proceeding with plans to build and develop the curriculum for *Piqqusilirivvik*, the cultural school to be located in Clyde River, with satellite campuses and programs in Baker Lake and Igloolik.

The cultural school will help us teach and pass on Inuit traditional skills and knowledge. It takes special skills and knowledge to be able to maintain a connection to a land that is as vast as Nunavut. Use of the land by Inuit helps assert Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic.

The underpinning of traditional values and knowledge is the history of a people. That is why Nunavummiut want to return their cultural treasures and heritage collections from storage in the Prince of Wales centre in Yellowknife as well as other places.

Working in partnership with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the government is proceeding with the design of a Nunavut Heritage Centre, which will be built in Iqaluit. Ten million dollars have already been set aside for the centre.

The government is seeking additional funding to make the heritage centre a reality and we look forward to the day when we can bring part of our history home.

Inuit are proud of their culture and their language and recognize the importance of keeping both alive.

Since the creation of Nunavut, language legislation has been one of the most anticipated legislative initiatives.

The Government of Nunavut has made it a top priority to develop language legislation that will recognize the importance of Inuit languages in all aspects of our daily life.

At the same time, the government will ensure that all Nunavummiut can receive basic services from their government in English and French as well.

Eighty-five percent of Nunavummiut are Inuit and most speak Inuktitut. And, there are Inuit who want to relearn or learn their language. The government wants to recognize and support this reality with a legal foundation.

Two bills will be presented to the Legislative Assembly for your consideration. One bill will be for the Official Languages Act, the other for the Inuit Language Protection Act.

Education

Another important aspect for a strong language and culture is an education system. As we move forward as a relatively new government the time has come to create a made-in-Nunavut education system

One of the steps to achieving this is to have our own Education Act.

Ensuring that Inuit languages remain strong today and in the future is a key objective of a new Education Act. A solid bilingual education approach will be an essential element for stronger communities and our expanding economy.

An Education Act will also enable the government to create a system that is better at providing Nunavummiut with the knowledge and skills they will need to qualify for the increasing number of jobs that are being created by an expanding economy.

To this end, the government is making important progress with the creation of a trade school in Rankin Inlet.

The school will serve as the primary location for trades training in Nunavut. Funding has also been set aside to renovate and expand existing training facilities in Cambridge Bay and Iqaluit.

The government looks forward to the day where significantly more Nunavummiut have the skills to enable them to be full participants in the regular wage economy. The money they earn will have positive effects on a range of other sectors, such as the retail sector, and will assist with establishing a housing market for private home buyers.

Economic Development

Nearly all key indicators point to the fact that Nunavut is experiencing new economic activity. The economy is growing with the development of the mining, fisheries, tourism, and cultural sectors, with new growth in energy and transportation on the horizon.

Mineral exploration expenditure in 2006 approached \$200 million with spending from over 60 ongoing exploration projects. Nunavut today ranks in the top five of Canadian provinces and territories in exploration expenditure, and is the highest North of 60°. Diamonds, gold, uranium and base metals are the main exploration targets.

The Jericho Mine, the territory's first diamond mine, opened in August 2006. Construction of two new gold mines - Meadowbank and Doris North - is scheduled to begin this summer. Another base metal project, High Lake, and a major iron ore project, Mary River, are in advanced planning stages.

Wolfden Resources has signed a lands access agreement with the Kitikmeot Inuit Association, which moves forward Wolfden's High Lake project.

The release of the *Nunavut Mineral Exploration and Mining Strategy* is an important step in providing support for mining activity across the territory. The strategy will help guide the development of a strong and sustainable sector while ensuring that the environment is protected.

Important development and advances are also evident in our tourism and outfitting sectors and our fishery industry.

The government has allocated \$5 million from the Northern Strategy Trust Funds for community economic development with an emphasis on supporting non-decentralized

communities. The *Small Communities Initiatives Program Policy* has been developed and this year communities will receive funding for community-based economic initiatives.

In addition, the government has allocated \$5 million from the trust fund to be spent promoting environmental stewardship and protection with an emphasis on those initiatives that also contribute to the economy. This year the Department of the Environment will start developing a recycling program which will include some early pilot projects. And in order to start reducing the number of old vehicles that end up in our landfill sites, the department will develop and implement pilot projects for the 2007 sealift season targeting those communities with completed inventories.

Transportation

Economic development is dependent on strengthening our transportation links to Canada and the rest of the world. Increasing demand for our goods and services requires growth and improvement of our infrastructure to keep pace.

The Nunavut Transportation Strategy is being updated, and this key document will help guide us and our partners in making decisions on improving the system. Our aim, through those improvements, is to decrease costs to businesses and Nunavummiut, while making our exports competitive with the rest of the world.

All of these developments indicate that Nunavut's small private sector will play a more prominent role in the territory's economy.

Devolution

As Nunavut's economy grows over the coming years, we need to ensure that Nunavummiut will benefit directly from development of our natural resources.

Today, the federal government still owns and controls our non-renewable resources. For Nunavut, that represents lost royalty and tax benefits in the hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

Devolution will make Nunavummiut the principal beneficiaries of their natural resources and allow them to become stronger contributors to Canada.

It will reduce Nunavut's dependency on federal transfers and help Nunavummiut achieve a standard of living comparable to that of our fellow Canadians.

Devolution is also important to Canada. It is a major step along Canada's own path of nation building. Most importantly, devolving control over the oil and gas resources beneath Nunavut's internal waters will strengthen Canada's Arctic sovereignty.

The Territorial Government is ready to start negotiations. The GN urges the federal government to establish a devolution mandate that includes our internal waters, so that we can move ahead quickly on this very important initiative.

Fiscal Framework

In the meantime, Nunavut will also continue to make its case to the federal government for a fiscal framework that recognizes the needs of Nunavummiut and the unique environment we live in.

Nunavut requires a territorial financing arrangement that allows the territorial government to deliver programs and services comparable to other jurisdictions in Canada. So we look forward to good news regarding the territorial funding formula in the federal budget on March 19.

Nunavut is also looking for recognition from the federal government that the territories require predictable long-term funding to ensure that basic infrastructure needs can be addressed so that our infrastructure meets Canadian standards.

The territorial government is already making significant capital investments to improve our infrastructure. It is working with the federal government through the Municipal Infrastructure Fund, as well as with the Nunavut Association of Municipalities.

This partnership resulted in the Department of Community and Government Services recently announcing that more than \$130 million will be allocated over the next five years for infrastructure projects. This includes the construction of new community centres, sports arenas and road upgrading.

But we will not be able to close the infrastructure gap with an incremental approach within the territorial funding formula and various targeted federal funding programs. Nunavut will continue to work with the other territories to seek the establishment of a Strategic Northern Infrastructure Fund to jointly achieve infrastructure objectives across the North.

We want the federal government to join us to finish the job of building Canada.

Housing

One model for such a partnership is housing, where the federal government has contributed \$200 million to the Housing Trust.

Over time this funding will result in the construction of 725 much needed housing units.

The Nunavut Housing Corporation is planning to spend \$74.4 million of this money to commence construction of 236 units during the 2007-08 fiscal year and to complete the construction of 96 units that were started during the last construction season.

Government Business

During this session, the Government of Nunavut will be introducing the following bills entitled:

Bill 1, Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2007-2008

Bill 2, Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 3, 2006-2007

Bill 3, Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance Act, No. 3, 2006-2007 for consideration by the House.

The government considers these bills essential to the good conduct of government business and, as such, I recommend their passage.

Energy

One of the realities of living in Nunavut is the high cost of energy, which restricts the government's ability to invest in priority programs and services such as education and health care.

It is vital that Nunavut develop an energy strategy to lessen our dependence upon a non-renewable energy resource such as oil and plan for our future.

Members of this House, as well as other Nunavummiut, will soon receive a discussion paper that is the first step in developing an energy strategy. It proposes energy saving and conservation measures as well as the development of alternative energy sources.

Health Care

Health care is one of those areas in which the government has worked hard to improve and expand services so that Nunavummiut are able to receive the care they need as close to home as possible.

As part of this the Department of Health and Social Services opened a new health facility in Igloolik just over a month ago.

This \$8.8 million facility will serve 1,400 residents by providing acute care services, home and community care, social services, public health and emergency services.

And other new community centres are under construction in Pangnirtung and Pond Inlet.

In June of this year, health services are scheduled to begin moving into the new Qikiqtani General Hospital in Iqaluit.

The government is also addressing health care staffing and program needs. Recruitment is underway in all areas with a focus on training Nunavummiut and new program development is focused on a public health strategy - developing healthy communities.

This commitment to the health care needs of Nunavummiut will always be front and centre for the territorial government.

Suicide Prevention

However, government isn't the only place for answers or for solutions to some of our challenges. The government believes that suicide prevention and developing healthy lifestyles is one of those areas. Government doesn't have all the answers, but it can and will work in partnership with others to reduce the number of suicides in Nunavut.

The government's approach to suicide prevention will be influenced by Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles that focus on embracing life. The government will continue to actively support community-based approaches involving elders and families in suicide prevention and intervention and its efforts to build healthy communities.

The government welcomes the contribution and good work by the Isaksimagit Inuusirmi Katujjiqatigiit – the Embrace Life Council -- which is working with communities to ensure a wide range of suicide prevention responses.

Nunavut's Increasing Role

Nunavut has moved forward during the past eight years, building and expanding partnerships with people and groups from outside the territory.

It is partnerships such as this that enable us to learn from the best practices being used elsewhere. And it enables people outside Nunavut gain an appreciation of our people, our land, our language, our culture.

Our record presence at the Canada Winter Games is but one of example of our increasing role in Canada and the world.

This summer Nunavut will host the Western Premiers' Conference for the first time in our history, providing an opportunity for us to showcase our progress and beautiful land to the Premiers of Canada's northern territories and four western provinces.

A few days later in July the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women will be hosting a meeting in Nunavut of her federal/provincial/territorial colleagues.

We are also adding our voice on the international stage.

The Minister of Environment is in Washington this week at a hearing to make our case against a proposal by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to list polar bears as a threatened species under its Endangered Species Act.

Key decision makers in Washington need to know that polar bears are not a threatened species. Nunavut's polar bear management regime is the very model of how a conservation program should be run.

Our Minister emphasized that countries should target climate change -- not polar bears. Such a move would not help polar bears and hurts Inuit – the very people who are part of the fight against climate change and who are supportive of efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Also on the international stage, the territorial government is involved in planning for International Polar Year activities.

International Polar Year underlines the increasing interest by international scientists in Nunavut and we commend the federal government for its commitment of \$150 million for a Canadian International Polar Year program.

Another area where we have worked cooperatively with the federal government is in the profiling of the unique contributions of Nunavut to Canada and the world.

A Tourism Cooperation Accord will be signed next month with the Government of France.

And through the Association des francophones du Nunavut our vibrant French speaking community has partnered with the Government of Nunavut and the hamlet of Kimmirut in developing cultural tourism training and products.

Conclusion

We are privileged that we live in a territory that is unique and that has the self confidence to look beyond its borders.

People from beyond our borders look to us -- to see how Nunavummiut are going about building a new territory that has a distinctive culture, that has an abundance of natural resources and a large store of optimism in a dynamic population.

The creation of a new territory came with great optimism. At the same time we recognized much work needed to be done.

We have the strength from our history, culture and the optimism to do that work and celebrate our successes. Our success – culturally and economically -- will help make a stronger Canada.

May Divine Providence guide your deliberations.

Nakurmiik.