

Inuit Call on Canada to Take Immediate Action at WTO Following EU Vote Banning Seal Imports

Tuesday May 5, 2009 – Ottawa, Ontario – National Inuit leader Mary Simon expects Prime Minister Stephen Harper to follow through with Canada's stated commitments to take WTO action against the European Union now that the EU Parliament has in fact voted to proceed with a ban on the import of seal products into the European Union countries.

"Inuit are devastated at today's vote," stated Mary Simon. "Our economies had rebuilt themselves and we fought to make sure that this day would not visit us once again—to avoid the tragic situation of the 1980s. This will cause more despair among our Inuit youth. The stated exemption in the legislation will not help us as the markets will once again be effectively destroyed. As Inuit leaders have stated across the Arctic, once you destroy a market for one group, it is destroyed for all."

The national Inuit leader noted that today's vote flies in the face of legal advice from the European Union's own lawyers which advised EU Parliamentarians that the proposed ban would not be legal under either EU law or under international trade law, and could easily be challenged at the WTO. ITK obtained a copy of this opinion. "It is astonishing that, while the European Union is founded on the rule of law, it is prepared to ignore the constraints of law when it is politically expedient. Inuit expected better," said Ms. Simon.

President Simon further noted that the EU's action could only raise additional questions surrounding the credibility of the EU's announced hopes to play a more active role in Arctic affairs that would give appropriate weight to the rights and circumstances of arctic indigenous peoples. "The EU's harsh actions are speaking louder than its soft words," said Ms. Simon. The Arctic Council is still considering the EU's bid to be a permanent observer at the Council.

President Simon concluded that it is regrettable Canada did not contest earlier legislative bans by Belgium and the Netherlands at the WTO. "This EU wide ban shows the escalating cost of inaction", said Ms. Simon. "Canada has no choice but to react firmly and forcefully this time."

Quelle/Source:

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