

For Immediate Release

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)

Circumpolar Inuit Launch Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty

Tromsø, Norway - 28 April 2009 - Inuit leaders from Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and Russia today launched a Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty.

In developing this declaration, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) worked with Inuit across the circumpolar Arctic over the past six months to address the increasing focus by outsiders on the Inuit homeland known as Inuit Nunaat. Climate change and the subsequent race for Arctic resources have forced Inuit to address questions such as 'who owns the Arctic?', 'who can traverse the Arctic?', and 'who has rights to develop Arctic resources?'

"Our declaration," said ICC Chair, Patricia Cochran, "addresses some of these questions from the position of a people who know the Arctic intimately. We have lived here for thousands and thousands of years and by making this declaration, we are saying to those who want to use Inuit Nunaat for their own purposes, you must talk to us and respect our rights."

The Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty emphasizes the unity of Inuit as one people across four countries, and also addresses the unique relationships Inuit have within each respective state. The declaration makes a strong pitch that internationally-accepted human rights standards, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international legal instruments must be respected. It also calls for close cooperation among Arctic states and Inuit on all matters of Arctic sovereignty.

ICC Vice Chair for Canada, Duane Smith, said that provisions in the declaration "make it clear that it is in the interests of states, industry, and others to include us partners in the new Arctic, and to respect our land claims and self-government agreements."

Tatiana Achirgina, ICC Vice Chair for Chukotka stated, "we believe that this declaration will form a solid foundation for us to continue our self-government processes here in Chukotka in partnership with the Chukotka Administration and the Russian Federation."

ICC Vice Chair for Greenland, Aqqaluk Lynge, said from Nuuk, "this is not an Inuit Nunaat declaration of independence, but rather a statement of who we are, what we stand for, and on what terms we are prepared to work together with others."

The drafting of the declaration was initiated by those gathered at an Inuit Leaders' Summit on Arctic Sovereignty, which was held in Kuujuaq, Canada, 6-7 November 2008.

Mayor Edward Itta of the North Slope Borough, who is also ICC Vice Chair for Alaska, said "launching our declaration is historic as it reminds us of the day ICC was established here in Barrow in 1977. This declaration will strengthen us as one people across four countries."

ICC chose Tromsø as the place to launch the declaration as it coincided with the Arctic Council foreign ministers' meeting, as well as the Melting Ice conference, jointly headed by Nobel peace prize winner, Al Gore, and the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs. ICC leaders participated in both meetings.

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