

UNPFII Presentation

Introduction

Ullaakkut/Good morning. It is my pleasure to be here this morning.

I sit on the UNPFII as a representative of the Arctic Region so it would not surprise any of you that I was particularly intrigued by Arnaq's presentation from Greenland, yesterday, where she spoke about Greenland's cultural naming method, which, in my mind makes a lot of sense to tap into the expertise of the hunters, fishers and harvesters who are out on the land and sea and ice.

UNGEEN

I read with interest your Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 – 2029. I noted Aim III that recognizes, respects and promotes the value of geographical names as significant elements of cultural heritage, language and identity, including those of Indigenous Peoples which is further built upon in strategy 4 on culture, heritage and language recognition.

As a Group of Experts on Geographical Names, I think you are very well poised to make an impactful positive contribution to Indigenous Peoples' identity and languages. I am pleased to see that you are committed to strategy 2 on relationships, links and connections as well as the theme for this year, on "Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and for sustainable development and pandemic recover".

UNDRIP

As you are aware, UNPFII is a high-level advisory body to ECOSOC with a mandate to deal with indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the

environment, education, health and human rights. Further, we promote the respect for and full application of the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In the context of this current meeting of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), I draw your attention specifically to UNDRIP Article 13.1 which states: Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

IDIL

The UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 – 2029 falls within the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032. There is a Global Action Plan for the Decade that provides a strategic framework that outlines major actions and guidelines for implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Output 6 speaks specifically to Indigenous Peoples' languages being a vehicle of living heritage which allows for more participation and access to all forms of culture. On Friday, we concluded the twenty-second session of the UNPFII. Throughout the session Indigenous Peoples consistently expressed the importance of Indigenous Peoples' languages. In our final report, we captured the following sentiment, "When an Indigenous Peoples' language becomes extinct, the richness of the ways of life and world views of Indigenous Peoples is lost, which is detrimental both to Indigenous Peoples and to the world."

Nunavut

As a way of illustration, I am going to spend a little bit of time specifically on Inuit in Nunavut.

I live in Iqaluit, Nunavut which is the eastern Arctic territory in Canada. The public majority population are Inuit whose mother tongue is Inuktitut.

I live in Iqaluit, Nunavut. In 1987, I would have told you that I live in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories.

In Inuktitut, Iqaluit is the plural word for fish – arctic char to be precise. In Arnaq's slide yesterday, you may have noticed the word 'Iqaluit' to denote a place of good fishing. So, when I hear, "Iqaluit" for me it conjures up the image of delicious orange-fleshed fish – eaten raw, frozen, fried, boiled, baked, dried, candied etc. It conjures up happy times. Sharing a fish meal with family and friends – because eating is never fun alone. It conjures up the adrenaline rush of catching the fish through ice fishing in the brightness of the spring sun or the rush of feeling the tug on the fishing rod or trying to keep the fish still enough to take it out of the net.

In Inuktitut, Nunavut means "our land" which includes the sea and the ice. When I hear 'Nunavut' it reminds me that I am of a collective peoples that are from the land and the sea and the ice and that we belong here. Our landscapes, our environment, the crispness of the air, the breathtaking views, the crackling of the ice, the sparkle of the snow, the steam of our breath are a part of us as much as we are a part of it. It would not be without us the way we would not be without it.

I commented that if you had asked me in 1987, I would have told you that I lived in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories. Between 1955 and 1987, in English, Iqaluit was officially known as Frobisher Bay. Martin Frobisher was an Englishman who had been looking for the Northwest Passage. He believed that he had discovered the Northwest Passage. He also believed that he had discovered gold on a close by island but instead

it was fool's gold that he took home to England. In 1987, after having been known as Frobisher Bay, Iqaluit officially reverted back to its Inuktut name.

The name, “Northwest Territories” has had a long history, with beginnings in the early fur trade. It was loosely applied to vast lands north and west of Lake Superior. In 1870, this land was transferred from the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) to Canada. This was a vast geographic space, including what is today, Nunavut. Starting in the early 1970’s Inuit had started negotiating a land claims agreement with Canada which ultimately resulted, in 1999, with the creation of the Territory of Nunavut.

Geographic Names

As Indigenous Peoples, reasserting our names for geographic places and features is very empowering. Inuit place names transmits the Inuit language, Inuit culture, Inuit world views, Inuit values and beliefs. Geographical names connect Inuit to the land and sea and ice. It plays a role in hunting – when to hunt and where to hunt. Inuit place names provide a sense of place. Inuit place names describe physical features. Inuit place names relate to Inuit cultural wellbeing.

The Inuit Heritage Trust through its work on geographical names has collected more than 8000 place names. This involves research on traditional place names through discussions with Elders and hunters to better reflect the historical and traditional use of sites in Nunavut. These are captured on maps and in databases. In today’s world, the place names are used by search and rescue to locate those who are lost and where the importance of place names is key to the successful search and rescue efforts.

In Nunavut, some of the communities continue to have official English names – many named after explorers. In 2019, during the International Year of Indigenous Languages,

in my capacity as the President for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, I wrote letters to some Nunavut mayors encouraging them to consider officially changing the community's name into its' Inuktitut name. As a result of this, Cape Dorset (named by Captain Luke Foxe to honour his benefactor, Edward Sackville, 4th Earl of Dorset) and Hall Beach (after the American explorer Charles Francis Hall) each officially changed their name to Kinngait and Sanirajak, respectively.

Conclusion

I want to conclude my presentation by highlighting the power of commemoration. I was pleased to see this reflected in one of your action items – specifically 4.ii.6.

In 2021, Canada established September 30 as an annual statutory holiday – a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – often referred to as Orange Shirt Day. This was the same year that the remains of 215 Indigenous children had been uncovered in an unmarked grave outside the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. The important work of identifying unmarked graves continues while the numbers continue to rise. This Day is a solemn reminder of the heavy, traumatic and calculated attempts, by state and church, of cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The intergenerational impacts of residential schools remains strong in our communities. The last school was closed in 1997.

In anticipation of the Pope Francis' visit to Iqaluit in July 2022, given the deep rooted impacts of residential schools in our communities, I encouraged the mayor and council of Iqaluit to consider a commemorative naming of one of the streets. Dedicating it to residential school survivors, Iqaluit changed the former "Federal Road" which leads to the former residence of Inuit students attending federal day school to "Sivummugiaq

Street”. In Inuktitut, sivumugiaq means ‘moving forward’. The use of our language in naming can be very healing, meaningful and comes from a place of strength. In addition, sivumugiaq is the only orange street sign in Iqaluit to visually remind us of the impacts of residential schools in our communities while reminding us to move forward despite our living history.