



Press Release:

Inuit from Russia, Alaska, Canada & Greenland Meet in Nuuk at Inuit Education Summit

February 15, 2018 – Nuuk, Greenland – Inuit pedagogical experts and practitioners from across the circumpolar region met here over three days at an education summit to deal with the urgent formal education gap facing their communities and to share successful pedagogical approaches with each other. It was also attended by ministers, Inuit political leaders, youth, and observers.

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Greenland president, Hjalmar Dahl, who hosted the summit said, “we heard how our different histories of colonization and pathways to self-determination have landed us in dissimilar educational places today.” He added, “but what was striking was the similarities in our struggle and in our agreement to build on the Inuit-focused success stories we heard of from Inuit in all four countries in which we live.” Mr. Dahl also said that he was most happy with the recommendation to set up a circumpolar committee to secure continuation of this important Inuit dialogue.

“Our text books used to teach us about Dick, Jane, Puff, Spot and apple trees, but then we took control of our own education system and started to record the knowledge of our elders, who eventually told us this was not enough,” Jana Harcharek, Iñupiaq Director of Education of Alaska’s NSB School District said. “Our elders told us to infuse this knowledge into the fabric of our curriculum.”

From Canada, Aluki Kotierk, president of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. gave a powerful presentation in which she said that in spite of the natural tendency for Inuit to be accommodating, it was now time to use the “tools we have imbedded in our self-government agreements and forge ahead with an Inuit-focused pedagogy, to address the unfairness and inequities between Inuit and others head on.” She said Inuit youth need to see positive messages about Inuit reflected in their schools, to be taught in Inuktitut, and to learn from an Inuit-centric curriculum. She concluded, “Inuit will continue to be nice, but we should not be nice to injustice, ... not be nice to inequity ... not be nice to unfairness.”

All participants from Russia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland agreed that a major predictor of the success of an Inuit-focused pedagogy is the way in which language is incorporated into its development. Robbie Watt from Canada, and president of Kativik Ilisarniliriniq added to that by singing for participants, then saying, “music is a way of teaching.”

Mayor Asii Chemnitz Narup welcomed participants to Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq. In her address, she said she felt that something in contemporary life was wrong, giving rise to “a feeling of emptiness, alienation, and meaninglessness.” Still, she had pride in Greenlandic youth, mentioning their success at the Arctic Winter Games, among other things. She encouraged Inuit educators to build upon this pride and to help overcome this meaninglessness by integrating Inuit-focused pedagogies with that what the modern pedagogical tools have to offer. “We must let our younger generations – through education – get the ability to master and integrate both conditions,” she said.

ICC ALASKA

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ICC Chair Okalik Egeesiak ended the three-day event by saying, “this summit has validated my belief that Inuit must be put first in our own education, and that we are equipped to do so. It is also an important first step towards reconciliation and re-empowerment, using education as a tool.”

ICC’s executive council will take home the outcomes and proceedings of the summit to review them with Inuit educators and leaders in their respective countries before drafting recommendations to Inuit delegates at the upcoming July 2018 ICC General Assembly in Utqiagvik, Alaska.

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ICC-Alaska is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that works on behalf of the Inupiat of the North Slope, Northwest and Bering Straits; the St. Lawrence Island Yupik; the Central Yup’ik and Cup’ik of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region in Southwest Alaska. ICC-Alaska exists to be the unified voice and collective spirit of Alaskan Inuit, to promote, protect, and advance Inuit culture and society. ICC-Alaska is a national member of ICC International, an international non-governmental organization. ICC strives to strengthen unity among Inuit of the circumpolar north; promote Inuit rights and interests on an international level; develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of the circumpolar North.