

Panel Theme: The future of Inuit Nunaat – building relationships and partnerships for a stronger Inuit Nunaat.

Quyanaqpak for the introduction. Madam Chair, Executive Council members, Elders, Delegates and Youth. It is an honor to be here in Utqiagvik attending the 13th General Assembly of the Inuit Circumpolar Council and to be among distinguished presenters. After coming together in Inuvik, Northwest Territories four years ago, it is always good to see old friends and meet new leaders from the four-member countries.

Building relationships is critical within our communities, between our regions, across generations, and with potential partners to promote our Inuit rights and values. Our Inuit history includes past Inuit leadership who played a major role in leading, guiding and working together with their fellow Inuit to preserve and maintain our well-being, culture, language, traditions, protection of our land and sea especially as the world continued to change around us.

These changes presented major challenges. Challenges such as the Native Land Claims, the protection of our Inuunialiqput, Our Way of Life, the social well-being of the Inuit and Food Security. We are blessed to have had Inuit Leadership with the fortitude to carry out their mission as they prepared us for the future. Strong, deep love, loyalty and politically confident distinguished leaders serving the Inuit peoples of the Circumpolar North, leaders such as the late Eben Hopson, the late Robert Newlin, Sr., the late Caleb Pungowiyi and the late Chief Doctor Paul John and others in each of your respective regions. Let us continue to acknowledge our past Inuit Leaders in each of our four-member countries that played a major role in getting us where we are today.

I would like to reflect on this theme with an experience from my childhood that touches on these important connections.

I was born and raised in a small village called Ipnatchiaq in the NANA region, also known as Deering, Alaska. Ipnatchiaq is the southernmost village on the Seward

Peninsula. It is located on a sandy spit where the Inmachuk River flows into the Kotzebue Sound, fifty-seven miles southwest of Qikiktagruk with a population of 126 residents who are predominately Inupiaq.

My mother passed on giving birth when I was just six years old and so my Aana, Itiptigvik raised me as her own daughter. My father with my two older siblings moved to Qikiktagruk seeking employment opportunities. After graduating from the 8th grade in my village of Ipnatchiaq, I left home for the first time to attend boarding school for my high school education.

Like many of you, I was raised by the entire village. My grandmother, uncles and the extended family members played a role in forming my character. As we played, did our daily chores and assisted with the subsistence harvest seasons, we were counseled, gently disciplined, and taught by the elders.

As a child, I witnessed and learned from the many gatherings and meetings held in my Aana's one room home. As I reflect back I now realize that my Aana was a respected leader in my village. Many meetings were held to prepare for Sunday school services, for the community meetings or whenever there was a need to address a community matter before the Traditional council members.

Because of the subsistence activities during the summer months, community meetings were seldom held. However, I recall one meeting where the entire community, including the children gathered at the classroom in the school. We all waited for the leader of the Traditional Council to arrive and of course all of us children were wondering what had happened in the village. Before the meeting started, two boys with both their parents moved up to the front of the classroom and sat facing us.

We had learned while the boys were playing behind the school building near the river, they found some old paint and decided to paint a section of the building. The action and discipline determined by the local leadership was to return the back of the school building to its original color with paint provided by the parents of the two boys.

This public setting and discipline taken impacted our childhood behavior and enforced the self-determination and respect of authority conducted in the late 1950's. We had volunteers enforcing the Traditional laws and mothers volunteering to cook meals during the school year for the students. Including our first Health Aide volunteering to be trained and providing health care services which was also located in the school building.

As we were raised in the village of Deering, Alaska, we were taught the Inupiaq values, we were taught respect by example and love for one another and the appreciation of hard work through the actions and behavior of the Deering Inuit relationships and partnerships.

For many of us in each of our Inuit regions, this is how we were raised, taught and mentored throughout our childhood and adult lives. By the leaders we looked up to as they served their people. Their actions, behavior and leadership were guided by their values, their inner being, their *ilitqusiq* which was more than their best practices.....***It was who they are as Inuit chosen by their people to lead.*** As Indigenous leaders, you have continued this passionate and powerful role which has been reflected in the presentations and comments made this week here at the ICC General Assembly.

Inuit leaders such as yourselves, the Chair, council members and delegates continue to focus on the overall well-being of the Inuit you represent, like those adults and Elders who worked to care for the whole community of Ipnatchiaq. Inuit members such as, Mary Simon, Jimmy Stotts, Duane Smith, Vera Metcalf and others in each of your regions. Each one of our countries at different phases of our life's journey maintained our values and a sense of compelling responsibility to sustain order, harmony and peace for our fellow Inuit as major accomplishments were achieved.

Across the circumpolar Arctic, each region carries out their leadership role and responsibilities differently, yet are guided by the same values. We have found in our region that establishing and nurturing partnerships is an important element in

creating a common vision and accomplishing organizational goals. The Northwest Arctic Leadership Team has been a useful forum to address a wide variety of issues and concerns. The team is comprised of President/CEO's; Mayor, Superintendent and board chairs of the four regional organizations. The NWALT members are kept informed of the priorities and activities of their respective organizations, and creates a forum to address critical focus areas common to the people they serve. Over the years, as they have worked together to build a better future for the people of their region, they have accepted the participation and support of the state and federal officials and agencies.

This partnership has helped to minimize duplication, maximizing resources and this collaborative effort allows each of the respective boards to make better and informed decisions. The current leadership focuses on the five critical areas: Inupiaq Language & Culture; Healthy Communities & Wellness; Education & Workforce Development; Economic Development and Infrastructure & Basic Services. These key areas guide and connect the member organizations to work together as they receive guidance and support from the Regional Elders Council, the City and Tribal Governments. This partnership works and must continue.

For the Inuit future of our people, we all know our hearts, mind and soul must follow the Inuit ways of knowing revealed by our past leadership and what they have accomplished during and following each of your General Assemblies. We must continue to think beyond ourselves and take action for the **whole** Inuit community.

Major changes and critical challenges are transpiring around us with the transformation of our way of life. For example, the opening of the Northwest Passage as the Arctic continues to be explored.

Our Inuit history demonstrates that as life changes happen on the global scale, we Inuit must come together to determine a path forward and in doing so add strength in those ventures. Establishing a common understanding and developing

partnerships practiced by the ICC General Assembly, the ICC Executive Council and Presidents with governing Inuit boards charged to implement and carry out the ICC Declarations which covers many critical focus areas important to the Inuit collectively. This model works and must continue.

Through our encounters and conflicts, we have chosen to adapt, yet have come to realize we must not compromise what we hold sacred to our way of life and our strong connection and protection of our land and sea. For generations, the Inuit has nurtured, fostered and handed down a profound respect for nature and all living species created by God for us to survive and thrive on. Let us continue to instill this right in future generations so that our Inuit way of life never perishes.

The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission is a good example of this determination. The members are registered whaling captains with a mission to I quote “safeguard the bowhead whale and its habitat, to defend the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Rights of our members and preserve the cultural and traditional values of our communities.” For the survival of their Inuit people, the AEWC has an all-inclusive approach for the well-being of their Inupiaq society. For generations, the Inupiaq whale hunters have not compromised their dependence on their whale hunting or their values of sharing during their celebrations. The AEWC and those in leadership positions have learned to develop partnerships with scientists and other experts to help educate those who make policies and regulations affecting subsistence whaling with tremendous success. We must continue with these important partnerships that have incorporated the Inuit traditional knowledge with western science as they worked together.

Within our communities, we pattern our initiatives with our Inuunialiqput, our way of life and are guided by our Inupiaq values.

By working together, we must continue to enforce and apply what has worked for us. Eighteen years ago a Cooperative Agreement was adopted by the North Slope Borough and the Northwest Arctic Borough “to look at and realize economic sustainability within the two boroughs.” The two borough governments shared information, cooperated on long-range land use planning and development, the

livelihood and protection of their subsistence resources, habitats and values, their roles and responsibilities for collaboration on specific projects and to further the delivery of quality government services.

Arctic Economic Development Summits were held to provide forums to share and discuss data with cross-section of people and organizations from both boroughs as they shared their community vision and values on Economic Development, Workforce Development, Healthy Communities and Quality Education.

Recently, the North Slope Borough and Northwest Arctic Borough met to prepare for the Joint Assembly Meeting held last week here in Utqiagvik. They discussed past resolutions to review and projects such as the Ambler Mining Industrial Access Road. The value of sharing allowed the North Slope Borough representatives to convey their understanding of their history with the Dalton Highway.

Within our region we are in the early stages of evaluating the Ambler Mining Industrial Access Road. Discussions started at the grassroots level when mining exploration commenced in the Upper Kobuk Ambler Mining District for copper after years of no activity. When the mining company began expressing the need for a transportation corridor during their consultation meetings with the Upper Kobuk Villages, the regional leadership, and tribal governments called for a similar the consultation process used during the development of the Red Dog mine. This consultation process ensures our people can be active partners in critical decisions about the future of our region.

Today our leaders are using this process with the neighboring Doyon region villages. Communications is critical to retain the relationship and respect between all parties involved.

Balancing responsible resource development with centuries old cultural traditions and practices which is sensitive and a time-consuming endeavor, but has tremendous rewards culturally, politically, socially and economically. Today the Inuit living in the rural areas where important resources exist are still dependent on the land and sea to survive.

In conclusion, present leadership must instill in our Inuit youth as they continue to lead, the values and guiding principles which were instilled in us at a young age. Although the cost of living is high in rural Alaska, many young well-educated and trained Inuit are finding ways to adapt and are choosing to return to their villages. As Inuit, we know what is sacred to us- our way of life, food security, our traditional ways, our Native foods, our Inuit languages, our spirituality. We must always emphasize culture because it is crucial. We must emphasize education because it is important. We must emphasize our villages because they are vital to maintaining our identity.

Keeping what is sacred does not mean that we should not look for new ways. In fact, as Inuit we have always adapted to survive in a changing world. We need to continue to adapt to changes, and to use them to our advantage, embracing new tools and technologies so we can keep scanning the horizon, understanding opportunities and taking hold of them in our own unique, Inuit ways. We can do so with dignity and respect for **all** people and for our land and natural environment. It is a vital part for the future of all Indigenous Peoples. We must continue to instill this in our younger generation, our Native ways of knowing, our Native ways of adapting and our Native ways of living.

Let us continue to survive and thrive as Inuit of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, treating each other with dignity and respect, showing compassion and caring of the less fortunate, demonstrating humility and understanding when given the privilege to lead and serve. Fostering and encouraging generational diversity at all levels of leadership. Let us continue to build relationships and partnerships for a stronger future for the land of the Inuit. Quyaana, thank you for your attention and God bless you.

