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NUNATUKAVUT PRESIDENT PARTICIPATES IN THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

NEW YORK CITY, NY, USA, April 25, 2019 – NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell is attending the 18th Session of the United Nations (UN) Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues this week in New York City. It is being held at the United Nations Headquarters from April 22 to May 3, 2019.

This forum is a high level advisory body to the UN's Economic and Social Council to deal with Indigenous issues all over the world related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. This year's special theme is "Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection."

It is the second consecutive year that President Russell has attended this important event to represent and tell the story of the Inuit of NunatuKavut. He was joined by Amy Hudson, NCC's Manager of Research, Education and Culture.

While at the UN, President Russell delivered the following statement to forum participants, entitled *Recognition of the Indigenous Rights and Traditional Knowledge of the Inuit of NunatuKavut*:

"Thank you Madame Chair. I begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional territory of the Lenape. And, I acknowledge the presence of my fellow Inuit and Indigenous relations who are here today representing Indigenous peoples and nations from all over the world. It is an honour to be present.

I am an Inuk from NunatuKavut (which means our ancient land), the traditional territory of my people, in northern and eastern Canada and the elected leader. My people have occupied and had a special relationship with the land, sea and ice long before the arrival of Europeans. We were self-governing.

When the outsiders landed on our shores, they fought for control of our lands, our waters and our resources, that which has always been at the center of colonization. There were generations of strife and much violence and many of our people died defending their traditional territory.

Our ancestors fought outside encroachment for more than a century prior to the assertion of British sovereignty. In 1765, we entered into a Treaty. While this Treaty came with the promise of peace, friendship and trade, our fight to protect our traditional areas from outside interests continued.

Like many other Indigenous Nations, our people have lived through colonization for generations and it has impacted our language, culture, knowledge systems, education and way of life. But we are still here. The story of NunatuKavut Inuit is one of resilience, determination and belonging. Today, we continue to assert our right to self-government and the management of our lands, waters and resources, which is vital to our very survival.

In 2018, we entered into a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Canada based on the recognition of our Inuit rights and self-determination. While we are optimistic that this process will result in tangible and positive change, we still struggle with pervasive colonialist policies that discriminates against our people based on the state-imposed categories of Indigenous identity and access to rights. This has prevented us from accessing important health and other programming. Our people continue to suffer hardship due to this inequitable treatment.

We know that there will be meaningful change if Canada is willing to accept and honour, value and appreciate our traditional Inuit knowledge and how we choose to preserve and pass it along to future generations. It is necessary in how we move forward together in a spirit of reconciliation.

This is why we are particularly motivated and inspired by this year's theme of "Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection." It speaks to the importance placed on traditional knowledge and the protection of Indigenous cultures and way of life.

Our way of knowing is integral and necessary to enlightening a history of colonialism upon our people and the reclamation efforts of NunatuKavut Inuit. We are seeking respect from Canada as a people so that we may make good decisions as Inuit, on and for our lands, waters and ice.

Our stories told from our perspective are crucial in advancing the health and well-being of our people and communities. Embracing our knowledge as Inuit is the only way that Canada will fully come to recognize and appreciate our rights. And Canada must continue to not only endorse but implement UNDRIP, ensuring that the laws and policies of Canada are consistent with the Declaration.

I thank all those who are contributing to the fight for justice, equality and equity for Inuit and Indigenous Peoples wherever they live. We deeply appreciate the work of this Permanent Forum and the United Nations for their meaningful and lasting contributions. Nakummek. Thank you."

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