



## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

October 25, 2021

President Natan Obed  
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami  
75 Albert Street, Suite 1100  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7

Dear President Obed,

It is with great disappointment that I write to you in response to the letter from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) to the Prime Minister dated October 7, 2021, calling upon the Government of Canada to exclude NCC from accessing “Inuit-specific policies, programs and initiatives that are intended to benefit Inuit.” Let’s be clear, you as well as Inuit elsewhere on this earth understand that ITK has no authority whatsoever to deny the Inuit of NunatuKavut much-needed access to federal government programs and services. To do so based again on ITK’s presumed authority to say who is Inuit or not is a dark stain on the reputation and good work that ITK has been doing.

I have reached out to you on multiple occasions to discuss the NunatuKavut Community Council, and the Inuit we represent. I wrote to you on September 7, 2018, and again on May 10, 2021, with an invitation to visit our territory and learn more about NunatuKavut Inuit history, culture, and governance. The ability to meet, share stories, and introduce you to our traditional places is integral to understanding our people and culture. Had you responded positively and engaged in sincere and honest discussion it would have dispelled the misinformation, misconceptions, and basis on which your letter to the Prime Minister of Canada is based.

We are shocked and dismayed that, rather than responding to us, you chose to take this path, where you chose to try to inform opinions about us, without us. This runs counter to Inuit values as well as to the general understanding and acceptance of human decency, treating people fairly and with the respect and courtesy they deserve.

Your letter states that “The archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the territory claimed by NCC has never been permanently occupied by Inuit.” This information is incorrect and outdated and is based on biased, patriarchal, and Eurocentric views of our history. If you did any meaningful research at all, you would have discovered that there is overwhelming academic and community-based research that makes it clear and irrefutable that the Inuit permanently occupied south Labrador. And further, that our occupation was prior to both European contact and any assertions of European sovereignty.

Furthermore, robust genealogical research, oral histories, anthropology, and the like, all support and re-affirm the history and culture of our people. For ITK to make such an assertion without engaging with us runs counter to ITK’s own principles of self-determined research, research principles which we also adhere to. We too have suffered the

harms and impacts of “outsider knows best” and we have been working vehemently to establish strong relationships and strengthen our people and communities in research that is ‘about us’. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) makes clear that Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. We continue to do so, and our membership criteria are rigorous and require clear proof of Inuit ancestry, as well as connection to the communities in our territory.

On the following point we can agree: “Inuit never relinquished their homeland.” NunatuKavut Inuit are the beneficiaries of the British-Inuit Treaty of 1765, which was entered into in Chateau Bay, within our territory. This Treaty recognized that our Inuit ancestors were permanent and rightful owners of the lands and waters in NunatuKavut, the very same territory we occupy today. Agreement to the Treaty reflected continued Inuit self-governance and self-determination. Our ancestors offered no extinguishment of land or resources, but rather, made a commitment to co-exist in peace and friendship to trade with the British.

Like other Inuit and indeed other Indigenous groups, we have resisted the processes of colonialism and assimilation. Had you met with us to share stories and knowledge, we could have talked about the differences and similarities in our respective experiences of colonization. The story of Inuit in Labrador has most often been told by outsiders who had their own agendas, including the Moravians. This can be incredibly problematic when trying to understand the complex history of Inuit in Labrador.

Inuit historically travelled freely and maintained kinship networks all over Labrador, into the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and the North Shore of Quebec. The modern-day attempt to divide Labrador into “North” and “South” at Hamilton Inlet is but one of the many imposed geographic lines that were used to separate colonial activities with Inuit, on Inuit lands and waters, and does not reflect the realities of how our people lived. Inuit history through time must be understood with this fluidity and complexity in mind. While some of our experiences of colonialism may differ from other Inuit groups, we remain a distinct people in the same territory that our ancestors have occupied.

Today, our people continue to live on the same lands, waters and ice that were defended and secured by our ancestors over centuries. Our families continue to live according to seasons, following the food and sharing in traditions and practices that have been passed down to us. We continue to defend our homes, lives, and culture against colonial ways of thinking and knowing. We live in our places, and we stay connected to our culture, values, and heritage. We hunt, we eat wild meat (i.e., seal, birds, fish, etc.), we harvest, we trap, we make skin clothing, we travel over sea ice by skidoo and dog team and by water to our seasonal places, we navigate the waters and lands using the living memories passed down to us by our parents and grandparents, we continue to immerse our youth and children in our traditional places, and we share stories of belonging and kinship that remind us of where we come from and who we are.

We are also trying to heal from the intergenerational impacts of multiple forms of colonization over many generations. As examples, residential schooling, forced relocation, and the Grenfell Mission all continue to have very real impacts on our families. Relatedly, we also face varying degrees of food, water, heat, employment and health security issues across our territory. These realities are fundamentally connected to a history of colonization, including colonial attempts to erase our people and deny our culture. Despite all of this, our people continue to connect to culture and tradition and rely on them for our survival. We continue to talk about how our culture and our traditions will lead us into the future. This is what keeps us alive. We have always been here - this is our home.

Our Inuit heritage is not “fraudulent”, rather, it is well-documented. While some European men did marry into our communities, the idea that our Inuit grandmothers did not pass down our Inuit culture is rooted in the racist and sexist assumption that Inuit women would have been absorbed into the European culture of their husbands, and not Europeans being absorbed into the communities, families, and kinship network, and the Inuit way of life in the territory in which they found themselves.

There has always been a tendency for the colonizer to judge and make external observations about Indigenous peoples' culture and identity. Too often, this has been with a view towards the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Your request to the Government of Canada for the exclusion of NunatuKavut Inuit is repugnant and appalling and does not align with how we treat one another. Neither does it align with national Indigenous advocacy efforts, in which both ITK and NCC have been participants, as we seek to collectively advance the well-being of our people and communities. Our history, culture and well-being are strengthened by our stories of home, kinship, and family.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Inquiry further validated the historical and ongoing cumulative impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples in Canada. The Report and its calls to action demonstrate that all Indigenous peoples have a right to culture, justice, and health, amongst others. NunatuKavut Inuit were full participants in the MMIWG Inquiry, and our presence was supported and validated by the experiences of our people. Your call for the exclusion of NunatuKavut Inuit runs counter to the spirit and intent of this Inquiry and further perpetuates the wrongdoings of colonial governments. Your call for our exclusion is a call to increase the barriers we face, to that which is so fundamentally important to us, such as our culture, justice, and health.

It is abundantly clear that ITK has taken an unfounded and destructive position because it somehow feels that the NCC's progress and relationship with the federal government is going to lessen the programs and financial support ITK and its regional affiliates get from the government. This too is unfounded and again the evidence is clear: ITK and its member organizations are at an all-time high with the monies it is receiving. It is a fact that ITK and its member organizations receive billions year over year. In contrast, the NCC receives a minuscule amount of less than one percent of that which the ITK and its members receive.

Finally, we were so saddened and disappointed to see that ITK has taken such a colonial position in trying to adjudicate the Indigeneity of our people in the context of access to policy, programs, and initiatives when what we want is to remain on our ancestral lands and to live with equality and equity in relation to others. Our offer to you to learn more about our history, elders, youth, and culture remains open and it would appear this is needed more now than ever. While we are open to sharing our stories and our homes, we do not accept your call for exclusion, and we will do everything we can to protect our people from these forms of harm now and in the future.



Todd Russell, President  
NunatuKavut Community Council