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

**HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR, April 26, 2022** – The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) is virtually attending the 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations (UN) Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as an Indigenous Peoples Organization in New York City this week. It is being held in person at the United Nations Headquarters and virtually on Zoom from April 25-May 6, 2022.

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 "Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent."

It is the third time that NCC President Todd Russell has attended this important event to represent and tell the story of the Inuit of NunatuKavut. This year, President Russell presented the following statement, entitled *Recognition of the self-determination of the Inuit of NunatuKavut in Labrador, Canada* (check against delivery):

"Thank you Mr. Chair. We acknowledge that this forum is being held on the traditional territory of the Lenape. And, I acknowledge the presence of my fellow Inuit and Indigenous relations representing their peoples. 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 and have the right to be self-governing.

When the outsiders landed on our shores, they fought for control of our lands, our waters and resources, that which has always been at the center of colonization. In 1765, we entered into a Treaty. While this Treaty came with the promise of peace, friendship and trade, our fight to protect our lands and resources from outside interests continued and continues. 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.

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. This year's theme 'Indigenous peoples, business, autonomy and the human rights principles of due diligence including free, prior and informed consent' speaks to this. 'Free, prior and informed consent' is about self-governance. It is fundamentally about the right we have as Inuit to make decisions that impact us on our own lands, waters and ice.

On June 21, 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act received Royal Assent and became law in Canada. Unfortunately, the Government of Canada's work in this regard is tarnished with a distinctions-based approach which is antithetical to UNDRIP and to self-determination.

In Canada, three national Indigenous organizations have been cherry-picked by the colonial government as the 'legitimate' recipients and representatives of all Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is a deeply politicized and racist approach that ignores the needs and aspirations of our people and hundreds of thousands of others. Rather than embracing the principles enshrined in UNDRIP and the recommendations flowing from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, Canada has continued its journey of arbitrarily deciding and perpetuating control over identity, access to rights and Indigenous peoples themselves.

NunatuKavut Inuit are experiencing this exclusionary approach firsthand everyday. For example, the Government of Canada signed an Inuit Nunangat Policy just a few days ago that supposedly supports the self-determination of Inuit in Canada. But not all Inuit, like the Inuit of NunatuKavut, are reflected in this policy. Our exclusion around matters that impact Inuit in Canada under government policy and legislation illustrates how colonization continues to manifest itself in a modern era, even in times of supposed reconciliation.

In 2018, we entered into a nation-to-nation relationship with Canada based on the recognition of our Inuit rights and self-determination. It has been nearly three years since we entered into this process and we still struggle with pervasive colonial 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 and lifesaving health and other programming, which was especially brought to light during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Our people continue to suffer hardship in areas like health, economic development, heat security and food security.

And, as I speak today, federal decisions on the fishery continue to be made that decimate the livelihood of our people and communities.

We are seeking respect from Canada. Canada must implement UNDRIP with fairness and integrity and ensure the inclusion of NunatuKavut Inuit in doing so.

I thank all those who are contributing to the fight for justice, equality and equity for Inuit and Indigenous Peoples. We appreciate the work of this Permanent Forum and the United Nations.

Nakummek. Thank you."

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