



# STATEMENT

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## **NUNATUKAVUT PRESIDENT CALLS FOR INDIGENOUS-LED CLEAN ENERGY PROJECTS; SAYS NUNATUKAVUT INUIT PREPARING FOR TALKS ON POTENTIAL PROJECTS LIKE THE CHURCHILL RIVER**

**OTTAWA, ONTARIO, June 5, 2024** – NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) President Todd Russell delivered the following keynote address yesterday to participants from Indigenous communities across Canada at the Congress of Aboriginal People’s (CAP) 2024 Summit on Environment & Climate Change. It was centred around NCC’s journey of self-determination, the work NCC is doing to address the climate change crisis and the progress being made on energy sovereignty in NunatuKavut.

“Ullukut, atelihai. Good day and welcome. It is truly a privilege to be here with you representing my people - the Inuit of NunatuKavut. I am always pleased to have an opportunity to share who we are and what is important to us. Our story is one of resilience, resistance, and reclamation.

I speak to you today about our journey of self-determination. And I would also like to specifically talk about how climate change is greatly impacting our lands and our people, and the important energy sovereignty work we are undertaking to help address the climate change issues in our territory. These issues do not stop within our territory. They are shared all across the north.

I thank the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples for creating this space to talk about important issues like our environment and climate change. They do tremendous work in helping advance the rights and interest of organizations like NCC.

Translated from Inuttitut, NunatuKavut means Our Ancient Land. It refers to the traditional territory of my people who reside primarily in southern and central Labrador. Today, our people are spread out over a number of modern-day communities that have been permanently settled. Of course, these do not capture the traditional places our people lived and the movement of our people on a seasonal basis.

NunatuKavut Inuit have occupied and had a special relationship with the land, ice and waters of our territory long before the arrival of Europeans. European visitors to our ancestral homeland recorded our Inuit names for our traditional places. European colonizers later imposed other place names in a deliberate attempt to establish ownership of the region.

Our ancestors have always had a strong kinship network. Our governance system was family oriented. We made our own rules and laws about harvesting, about hunting, fishing and trapping. We were self-governing and made decisions about the things that were important to us and our families. When 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. That, which underpins climate change.

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

Today, we still live on the lands that were defended and protected by our ancestors over centuries. We still travel old trails and navigate the ice and sea. We fish for food from the very same places and the same waters that our ancestors did. And we practice our traditions according to the seasons.

NunatuKavut Inuit rights are represented through the NunatuKavut Community Council. We are on a path to greater self-governance and the management of our lands, waters and resources. NCC has recently developed and implemented our own governance model and law that reflects our Inuit values and ways of being, one of shared leadership.

Earlier this year, our membership adopted a values-based constitution that reflects our collective and individual rights and responsibilities to each other and all of our relations. It is also about our relationship and responsibilities to our lands, ice and waters. And we introduced a new Citizenship Law guided by Inuit values around families and belonging. NCC is developing our own Inuit harvesting laws as well. It is based again on our traditional ways of being and living, and our own observations about change.

We are also helping ensure that our lands, waters and ice and our people are protected from the climate change crisis, which I believe to be one of the greatest challenges of our time. This, of course, starts with the privileging of Inuit traditional knowledge.

Our people are telling us about the changes to our sea ice. The rising sea levels. The increased coastal erosion that threatens our shores. The unpredictable weather patterns experienced from season to season. And changing temperatures, which is having a major impact on our waters and the species living in them.

A strong Inuit governance system is critical to the sustainability of our community and cultural traditions and to our sustained connection to ancestral places and areas of importance. It further highlights the importance of passing on knowledge and observations about the environment to future generations. We, as Indigenous peoples, are the stewards of our lands and waters.

We have been stewards since time immemorial, and we know best how to ensure it is protected and nurtured for the future. We have so much knowledge to share and lend to this work and we want to do more. This can only happen in a good way if our rights are recognized and respected on our lands. And that we have the resources to appropriately respond to important issues like climate change and its impacts. But to do so, Canada must live up to its commitments to Indigenous peoples in this country. And not just some Indigenous peoples. And not just to some Inuit. But to all Indigenous peoples and to all Inuit.

For NCC, this means moving forward to advance our rights and recognition process. While we are optimistic that this process will one day result in tangible and positive change, we still struggle with colonialist policies and action that discriminates against our people, denying our people access to their rights and their lands. Our people continue to suffer hardship due to this inequitable treatment.

NunatuKavut Inuit have experienced persistent periods of colonization. Hundreds of our families are still grappling with the lasting and painful impacts of residential schools in Labrador and in Newfoundland. And, today, our youth, our elders and many from this latest generation are experiencing extreme lateral violence and bullying as again, a result of Canada's colonialist policies.

Colonization has had lasting impacts on our language, culture, education and life ways and has resulted in the dispossession of our land, especially through resource development projects that have not the consent of NunatuKavut Inuit. We don't have to go too far back in time to look at NunatuKavut Inuit experiences around the Muskrat Falls Hydroelectric Development, an 824-megawatt megaproject built on our traditional territory. While the power lines go directly through our territory, it bypasses our nine remote and diesel dependent communities who most desperately need clean and affordable power.

This would not have happened with the involvement of NCC and, as a result, I can say with complete confidence and clarity that NunatuKavut Inuit will never again be left out of decisions that impact our lands and resources. Over the last couple of years, NCC has been engaged with our utility, who proposed to put a mega diesel project in our communities for the next 50 years. NCC vehemently opposed this approach and have since been working with the utility and the PUB so that the project better reflects the needs and priorities of our people, particularly with a view to climate change and its

impacts.

When our traditional knowledge gets raised up and our people are fully recognized and engaged, we have a more Inuit-led energy future. Energy sovereignty is also a process rooted in our people and communities.

Over the past number of years, in partnership with university researchers, we have deeply engaged over 200 NunatuKavut Inuit from our diesel-dependent communities to centre Inuit needs, priorities, and values in clean energy development. Key to our findings was the recognition that the imposition of outsiders is a significant factor impeding energy autonomy and sustainability in our communities.

These learnings have confirmed that we must move from energy and resource development projects that are simply built “on” our territory – to projects which are truly led “by”, “with” and “for” NunatuKavut Inuit.

There are lots of discussions happening around future development of the Churchill River or what our people still refer to as the Grand River, and what was referred to many times as the Eskimo River. NCC has reminded the Province of NL that NunatuKavut Inuit rights and interests must be addressed and accommodated before reaching any future agreement. Our people gave us a clear and strong mandate on this matter. This, we see, is an opportunity for the Government to finally get something right.

The bottom line is that we cannot have energy sovereignty and security without the involvement, engagement and consent of NCC and our people. Nor without the fulfilment of the free, prior and informed consent of NunatuKavut Inuit. NCC is well-positioned to lead in this work.

NCC has won important land-rights rulings on the Trans-Labrador highway, hydro transmission, and the law of injunctions. We gained standing in the Commission of Inquiry Respecting the Muskrat Falls Project and are currently awaiting the outcome of a federal court ruling (that we expect) will uphold our rights and recognition MOU with the federal government. We have ongoing agreements with industry and with NL Hydro.

Our work will always be guided by the values of inclusion, partnership and reconciliation. We need the support of others in the industry – utilities, government, non-government agencies to ensure that our vision of energy security is aligned. NCC and NunatuKavut Inuit are very willing partners on this and on other shared priorities. We have so much to contribute and lend to this work and we must do more.

We will sit at the tables that we need to in order address the issues that impact us all. To provide that consent that Canada needs on projects from energy to mining. But first we must have our rights affirmed.

NunatuKavut Inuit remain undeterred. We are reclaiming our Inuttitut language, our drum, protecting our husky dog teams, lifting up our own stories and working to ensure that modern education systems reflect our history and culture. I am immensely proud of our people, our families and our communities. They demonstrate so much respect and pride in our culture and our rich heritage.

At the NunatuKavut Community Council, we continue to focus on the work that we need to do that ensures that our people are safe, healthy and well. We continue to strengthen our governance. We are building on our work around fisheries management and we will continue with our food fishery this year, as we have for generation. When our people’s needs and interests are prioritized, this illustrates good governance.

We work with many partners and allies to help ensure the safety of those who take to the land and water to fish and harvest to make a living. These types of efforts help all people in the territory and across Labrador. We lift up our families and unite our communities. We are on a path that builds up, not tears down. One that affirms and does not diminish. That is who we are as a rights-bearing people and as an Inuit governing body.

We are working tirelessly to protect NunatuKavut Inuit, our rights, our way of life and wellbeing.

We have always been here. This is our home. Nakummek.”

**About:** The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) is a governing organization that represents Inuit who come from south and central Labrador. NCC is committed to advocating for section 35 rights, interests, and priorities of NunatuKavut Inuit. Rooted in the rich traditions and culture of NunatuKavut Inuit, NCC works diligently towards self-government and self-determination, while fostering community growth and sustainability.

*To learn more about NCC and NunatuKavut Inuit, please visit our website at [www.nunatukavut.ca](http://www.nunatukavut.ca) and we invite you to check out our new Story Map page which helps tell our story. Please also join in the conversation at [facebook.com/nunatukavut](https://facebook.com/nunatukavut), X/Twitter [@nunatukavut](https://twitter.com/nunatukavut) and Instagram [@nunatukavutinuit](https://instagram.com/nunatukavutinuit).*

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