



Office of the President

May 16, 2025

VIA EMAIL: president@mun.ca

Dr. Jennifer Lokash
Acting President
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL A1C 5S7

Dear Interim President Lokash,

Re: University of Saskatchewan Conference on Indigenous Membership and Citizenship Verification

I write as President of the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC), the representative body of more than 6,000 Inuit in south and central Labrador, to express our profound disappointment and deep concern regarding the attendance and presentation of Memorial University's Vice-President (Indigenous), Catharyn Andersen, at the recent University of Saskatchewan conference held from May 7–9, 2025.

Despite numerous prior engagements with Memorial leadership, including meetings with former President Bose and yourself as interim President, our voices continue to be sidelined in the development of Memorial's Indigenous verification policy, which remains in draft form. Ms. Andersen's participation in the panel, "Success, Challenges and Key Learnings in Developing Indigenous Membership/Citizenship Policies," while the public consultation period had only just closed on May 2, calls into question the fairness and openness of the policy review process.

Ms. Andersen's remarks suggested that NCC's perspectives were not meaningfully considered and implied a lack of legitimacy due to opposition from two other Indigenous groups. She acknowledged the harm the draft policy may cause to non-status Indigenous peoples but insisted implementation was still necessary, despite the consultation process being incomplete.

Of equal concern was the keynote address by ITK President Natan Obed. His statements were inflammatory, discriminatory, and blatantly false. He accused a "non-Indigenous group in southern Labrador" of siphoning tens of millions of dollars intended for Inuit communities, and alleged that federal funding and university research were being used to manufacture "newly formed Indigenous identities." He chillingly suggested

that those involved, our citizens, should face fines or jail time. These remarks were not only misleading, irresponsible, and untruthful, they amounted to an attack on NunatuKavut Inuit identity and dignity.

President Obed also emphasized ITK's work with Memorial and the University of Saskatchewan, further blurring any line between his hateful rhetoric and the direction of Memorial's draft Policy. When combined with Ms. Andersen's policy leadership role, her public commentary, and her ties to groups that actively oppose the recognition of NunatuKavut Inuit, we believe this constitutes a clear conflict of interest. It also appears to breach Memorial's Code of Conduct and Inclusion Policy, which commits to protecting diverse cultural identities and acting with accountability and integrity.

It is unacceptable that Memorial would continue to allow someone with demonstrated bias and an apparent closed mind to shape a policy of this magnitude. Ms. Andersen's ongoing leadership in this area erodes decades-long relationships with our people and undermines reconciliation efforts, particularly the recently co-developed Labrador Campus constitution, which recognized NCC as one of three Indigenous groups in Labrador.

NunatuKavut Inuit are the Indigenous people of our lands, lands we have occupied and defended since before European contact and Canadian sovereignty. Our people attend Memorial University, contribute to its research, and live in communities directly impacted by the University's operations and decisions. Yet, this policy is uniquely designed to exclude us.

There is no credible legal, historical, or academic rationale for Memorial's position to exclude NunatuKavut Inuit. Ms. Andersen must be removed from all further involvement in the policy development, and we respectfully request that she step away from the role of Vice-President (Indigenous) as Memorial investigates the conduct of the VPI in this matter.

Given the gravity of these matters, I request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Todd Russell

President, NunatuKavut Community Council

Cc: Dr. Janet Morrison, Incoming President
Mr. Justin Ladha, Chair, Board of Regents