

*International Conference on Language Rights - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Dublin*  
Presentation by the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, Ms. Sandra Inutiq

## **Introduction**

Dia is Muire dhaoibh', tá sé mar onóir a bheith anseo. Before I begin, I want to especially thank the organizers of the *International Conference on Language Rights*. It is a great pleasure to be here today.

In this presentation, I will briefly describe Nunavut, followed by an historical summary of language rights in Nunavut. I will then describe my roles and responsibilities as the Languages Commissioner for Nunavut and conclude points of interest and observations so far on language rights in Nunavut.

## **Presentation of Nunavut**

Nunavut is a vast territory of over 2 million square Km's, with a population of 33,000 according to 2011 census. Nunavut has a very young age, median age being at 24.8 compared to Canada's 39.9 this is an important factor in the language situation. There are 26 communities the smallest being Grise Fiord (population of 130), largest being Iqaluit, the capital (population of 6,700). There are no roads connecting the residents from different communities, most goods and people must be flown in by air travel and much of the cargo and supplies are brought in by ships annually.

So what is the language situation? First, I would like to state that we are relying on 2006 census because the 2011 one was not reliable for us for several reasons which I will not get into now. The federal government by policy has extracted much of its quality research methods which makes it difficult for regions such as ours to get the full language picture. So, the 2006 census... 85% of the population of Nunavut is Inuit. 71% of the total population claimed the Inuit language as their mother tongue in the 2006 census, 8% being unilingual Inuit language speakers. 1,205 claimed they can speak French, 435 of which stated it was their mother tongue,







The Minister of language is responsible to promote and bring awareness on history, status and importance of diversity. Also as significantly, to coordinate the effective implementation by territorial institutions and municipalities of language acts.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The powers and duties of the Languages Commissioner are listed in the *Official Languages Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, it is my responsibility in an ombudsman like role to investigate and review any possible breach of the language legislation by territorial institutions, municipalities and, soon, the private sector organizations. Languages Commissioner can bring an application to court to remedy any violation of the language acts. I am also responsible for public education on language rights, and advising language stakeholders to help achieve compliance. And at last, I monitor and examine the progress of territorial institutions, municipalities and private sector organization in meeting their obligations under the Nunavut's language legislation. Our work is published in our annual report.

### **Points of Interest and Observations**

To conclude, I will state points of interest and observations so far of the new language acts. You will note that in our language acts the word “complaint” is not used, and is replaced by the word “concern”. This is to make the acts more culturally relevant, as complaining is discouraged socially. In the acts there is much focus on mediation and informal resolutions to also make it more culturally in line with Nunavut. The new acts have also included an ability for the Languages Commissioner to initiate an investigation on their own, and the ability to combine cases. We have started our first systemic investigation as a result of these provisions and would like to share some lessons learned so far.

The observations we have made so far in how the language acts can be improved are: that the early childhood education provisions need to be strengthened to ensure children in a childcare facility are attaining the language, specific rights are held to ensure this; that statistics gathered need to be thorough and comprehensive to capture the language situation of all

official languages; that we have observed it is very difficult to separate hiring practices and policies on language to language services and communication; that a provision like an “obstruction” provision needs to exist to give the acts more teeth; when documents or information is requested during an investigation a time limit must exist for production; finally, that leadership and the sense of urgency by our leaders is a critical element that must be present if the language acts are to be successful in their objective.

Thank you, and I look forward to the discussions.