



Context

Our culture and identity includes Inuktitut, our traditional way of life (such as hunting, the making of clothing, country foods, arctic survival skills, and knowledge transmission), visual and performance arts, legends and myths, as well as Inuit values (such as sharing, helping others in need, working collectively for the benefit of the community, and listening to elders). All these things together define Nunavik Inuit as a distinct people. If we are not careful, there is a real risk that the continued development of our communities and of the region will impact on our traditional way of life, culture, language and identity.

A Few of the Challenges

Inuit culture and language are experiencing pressure from modern influences.

Although, it is commonly stated that 99% of Inuit speak Inuktitut at home, the reality is more complex than this optimistic number. In fact, a significant erosion process is taking place and today's youth face many challenges in maintaining their language.

There is not enough traditional and new media available in Inuktitut.

Youth see themselves as part of modern society that includes the Internet, iPods and video games, while elders, sensing a loss of Inuit culture among youth, have a hard time passing on their traditional skills and knowledge.

Suicide is 11 times higher among Inuit youth than in the rest of the Canadian population. One of many explanations for this statistical difference is a loss of identity.

Inuit traditional skills and knowledge have been diminishing over the years and outside influences such as governments and animal rights activists, as well as the high costs involved in practising traditional subsistence harvesting activities, are affecting hunters even further.

Inuit are facing health issues that were rarely encountered in the past.

Solutions and Priorities

Protect Inuktitut within the school system by developing curriculum that makes Inuktitut the language of instruction and encourage the creation of an Inuit culture, language and land skills educational institution.

Establish permanent funding for locally managed cultural spaces to promote and protect Inuit art, music and stories as well as the teaching of traditional skills.

Support Inuktitut-promotion initiatives for youth, through theatre for example.

Make provisions for a cultural agency or the Avataq Cultural Institute to direct the protection of traditional knowledge, oral history, historical materials and archives, cultural and art objects, as well as archaeological and burial sites and inuksuit.

Develop books, films and other materials in Inuktitut for use by the general public, in particular through the creation of a regional publishing house.

Set up an Inuktitut language authority responsible for standardizing Inuktitut terminology for modern use.

Develop programs, such as summer camps and workshops, to facilitate elder-youth exchanges and the sharing of traditional knowledge. Summer camps have been particularly effective in reducing the number of suicides among certain groups of youth.

Support local cultural committees and integrate regional and local culture into tourism development.

Provide resources to create women's centres in the communities.

Foster the practice of traditional Inuit sports and games in positive environments.

Set up a training program for Inuktitut-speakers interested in working in communications or journalism, and provide resources for Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. to reinforce radio broadcasting in Inuktitut, as well as develop television and Internet broadcasting.

Identify and protect archaeological sites before they are destroyed by development and stimulate the interest of Nunavimmiut in their history (through publications and education curriculum).

Discussion

Over the past century, Inuit have experienced enormous change in their way of life. In the 21st century, Inuit will more than ever be under pressure from the outside world. Inuit traditions, adaptability and a keen sense of survival will, however, carry us through these difficult times. But protecting and promoting Inuit culture and identity will require the commitment of the entire region: all organizations (in their workplaces, at meetings, and in negotiations with governments and developers) and in every part of our daily lives (at home, in schools, in public places, in the television programming we watch, the music we listen to, the books we read and on the Internet).

