Context

Inuit women are concerned with issues such as health, parenting, healing, suicide, violence, language and culture, and others. As the main caretakers of Inuit children, women are employed in the fields of education, daycare and social services. Inuit must carefully assess all the impacts that the development of the north could have on our culture and identity.

A Few of the Challenges

Our ability to support Inuit to successfully complete their education seems to be severely challenged. Trained Inuit professionals are needed in all sectors, including the mining industry. But the lack of proper qualifications continues to be an employment obstacle for Inuit.

Inuit workers at mine sites are voicing concerns about their treatment by non-Inuit workers. This treatment causes stress and causes many to quit their jobs. A possible problem of sexual exploitation of Inuit women at mine sites has also been raised.

Governments and educational institutions do not recognize the training of Inuit hunters. Too often, Inuit hunters are neglected in statistical data compiled regarding the educational achievement of Inuit.

Social problems in the communities are a major source of concern. Alcohol abuse, family violence, neglect of children, murders and suicide all contribute to the trauma being experienced by many. Families need to be encouraged to address their problems and to reach out for help.

Communities lack access to mental health professionals to assist those in need.

Poverty affects too many Nunavik households, three times the number in southern Québec. Most of those living in poverty are single-parent families and, often, young women.

While some communities benefit from the royalties paid by the Raglan mine, there are still many Inuit who will continue to live in poverty while mining companies get rich extracting minerals from the region.

Solutions and Priorities

Enhance cultural empowerment and increase the number of Inuit workers in regional institutions.

Establish a post-secondary institution in Nunavik and cultural schooling.

Identify mechanisms to recognize the contribution of hunters to Inuit society as well as to local and regional social economies.

Source: *Saturviit Inuit Women's Association Perspective on Plan Nunavik*.

Define new ways to reduce alcohol abuse and establish safe havens for children in need.

Strengthen the role of the Regional Partnership Committee and initiate a new approach to the resolution of social issues.

Train Inuit mental health counsellors and other professionals in every community and establish treatment centres for those with drug and alcohol problems.

In collaboration with mines and other industrial developers, implement child advocacy programs to raise awareness on the rights of Inuit children.

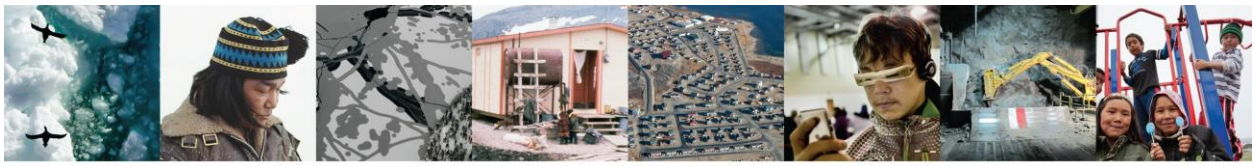
Implement cost of living reduction measures to reduce poverty in the communities. Mining companies must be called on to be part of the solutions.

Promote community economic planning to ensure benefits from the development of the north, beyond the jobs offered at mine sites.

Adopt measures to eradicate racism in the workplace, including the creation of an ombudsman position to represent the interests of Inuit workers and of nearby communities.

Create an independent body to oversee issues regarding environmental protection in the region.

Disseminate information to improve the knowledge of Inuit concerning development projects in the north to enable them to make sound decisions.

Discussion

Social problems can not be ignored while industries exploit the region for profit. Royalties obtained from industrial development should be directed to benefit Inuit communities, but not just for infrastructure or equipment. Social issues must be tackled at the same time, otherwise the gap between haves and have-nots will continue to grow. As well, like the Cree and Nunavummiut have already done, Nunavik Inuit must collectively make a statement on mining through a mining policy, which also deals with the issue of uranium mining.