

Plan Nunavik – Parnasimautik All Organizations Conference Saturviit Inuit Women’s Association Perspective on Plan Nunavik

Introduction

Saturviit Inuit Women’s Association really got started when Inuit and non-Inuit women from all the communities in Nunavik and southern Quebec had a gathering in Puvirnituaq in 2005. There, it was decided that a group of women would create and re-activate the Inuit Women’s Association of Nunavik, and the new association was incorporated in 2006 and is officially recognized as representing the voice of Inuit women. For those who do not know the meaning of Saturviit, the root word, satuq, means “regaining what one had lost”. Saturviit is in the plural and thus signifies “those who regain what was lost” symbolizing hope of a return of those aspects of our culture that we may think lost, a return of the Inuit way of doing things and the pride in Inuit identity.

Saturviit Inuit women are concerned with several issues happening in Nunavik. And when the Inuit women initially met in 2005 in Puvirnituaq they discussed concerns coming from their communities. The health and well-being of children, parenting, healing, suicide, violence, language and culture and other issues. Inuit women are the main caretakers of Inuit children and as such a large percentage of them are employed in the fields of education, daycare, and social services.

When we held our board of director’s meeting in Kuujuaq August 15 to 17 we had the opportunity to go through the document *Plan Nunavik* and held a day-long session going through most of the chapters. Inuit women are interested in the different issues explained in the *Plan Nunavik* and are keen to continue examining the issues of concern. We were able to discuss some main issues that we felt could be brought up at this present meeting.

One of the first things we observed about Plan Nunavik comes from the statement below, which is the vision as outlined in the Plan Nord document. It states:

LP< <-4Lr 42s^b Ld s^bl i^b2sd cDsr 4P r 2s^b 422r s Ad LcD 2s^r
D>9^c s4s2r i^r p^r n^r2s r^bc r n^c r s2r sD 2P 2c n^r2r Δ^b29D n^c n^r2r
D>L r c n^r2r 3, 4^b L 3 2^c Λ^c cD n^c i^b2r 2^c LP< <-4Lr 4P n^c
422r 2r 42 2r n^b 2^b i^b2s r 42s^b Δ 2P r 2r^b P 2D s2r 3 Δ c 2r r 42s^b .

An approach to sustainable development leading to an exemplary project integrating energy, mining, forestry, recreation, tourism, transportation, and

wildlife development, and promoting the growth of local communities in a way consistent with their **culture and identity**.

As also repeated by several at the conference here, the obvious importance of culture and identity make it such that the chapter on culture and identity should be placed first in a document such as Plan Nunavik, or as a last chapter to underline its utmost importance. Our position as Inuit with our own distinctive culture should be very clear in the face of the impacts that a strategy, such as the Plan Nord, can have.

The Issues

An issue linked to EDUCATION is the need for Inuit professionals not only in the mining industry but also in all of the sectors of our society. The gap between knowing that there is a need for Inuit professionals and actually finding a way to fill this need is not easy to close. Our ability to encourage and support Inuit to go through the education process seems severely challenged. In addition, the issue of certification for Inuit is often mentioned as an obstacle because few Inuit hold certificates in certain fields such as construction. Our board members call for cultural empowerment and to bring more Inuit as staff to the Inuit institutions. One of the ways that would encourage Inuit to gain certification is to establish a post-secondary institute in Nunavik. And it would only be positive to make it very clear in the Plan Nunavik that it is now necessary to build a post-secondary institute in Nunavik. This post-secondary institute should be established with the Inuit worldview as its foundation.

Another aspect of education lies in the recognition of Inuit hunters by governments and by educational institutes. Too often Inuit hunters are neglected by statistical counts when data is gathered on the educational achievement of Inuit. Not all Inuit will achieve post-secondary education, and Inuit men will continue to be hunters. One cannot expect all Inuit to achieve educational levels as expected by the rhetoric on Inuit educational achievement. There should be mechanisms in place to recognize the contribution of Inuit hunters to our society, such as in counting how many hunters are represented in a community, the social economy they impact and so on. There should be a CULTURAL SCHOOL established.

Some serious SOCIAL PROBLEMS in the communities preoccupy the minds of many Inuit women. Alcohol abuse, family violence, neglect of children, murders and suicide all contribute to trauma being experienced by many. Families need to be encouraged to address the problems they may be experiencing, to reach out for help. Furthermore the communities need access to mental health professionals to assist those in need. Saturviit sees the need for training programs for professionals, to become mental health counselors and other professionals in every community.

We cannot and should not depend on experts hired outside Nunavik and who stay only temporarily to provide mental health support for those in need. In addition more treatment centers for those with drug and alcohol problems must be established in Nunavik.

The pressing issue of the neglect of children, the need to protect children, continues to grow. Children need safe places to go to, especially those not under Youth Protection Services and who find themselves searching for a place to stay at night because their parents are drunk at home. Ways of reducing alcohol abuse and establishing safe havens for children are needed. Child Advocacy Centres can be built to raise awareness on the rights of Inuit children. This can be done with the collaboration of the mines that may wish to establish themselves near the Nunavik communities. In other words there should be institutional development to address social problems: better schools, treatment centers, programs and services.

Another problem gripping many is poverty. A report called *Poverty In Nunavik, State of Knowledge* by Gérard Duhaime shows that poverty affects 20 to 30% of households in Nunavik, and 44% of private households live with less than minimum-comfort budgets. These numbers are three times greater in Nunavik than in southern Quebec. Most of the people living in poverty are single-parent families. And as we know, these are usually young women. This dire situation must be improved. While some communities benefit from the Royalties from Raglan Mine and are doing better than others there are still many individuals who will continue to live in poverty while the mining companies continue to enrich themselves from extracting minerals in Nunavik. We should come up with ways and find solutions to erase poverty in the communities. Mining companies who will be extracting materials in Nunavik communities must work with Inuit to find solutions together to prevent poverty among young Inuit women. If we wish to see a prosperous Nunavik then we must also ensure that poverty be eliminated and that an economic plan for local populations to benefit from Plan Nord development happen not just through the jobs and salaries offered by the mining companies.

In addition, potential problems exist related to mining and women. In the south where First Nations women live, there are indications that prostitution occurs in association to the proximity of the mines to First Nation groups. We have thought that the risk of this happening among Inuit women in Nunavik is less marked since the only two mines in operation at this time are far away from the communities, and when there are Inuit women going to the mines they are actually employed by the mines. However, this type of risk must be taken into account because other mines exploiting the territory in Nunavik could very well establish themselves close to the communities in the near future. Another potential problem is related to the security of Inuit women working in the mines themselves. There have apparently been cases where workers in the mines had competitions to see who would be the

first to have sex with an Inuk woman worker. This type of behaviour is unacceptable in any society. The mining companies must ensure that respect is due to all employees, and that type of behaviour is not to be condoned in respect to the way Inuit women are to be treated. These women have families and children to take care of; they are mothers, sisters, aunts, and caretakers to members of their community. Different types of risks for women may exist at mining workplaces for Inuit women where a majority of workers are men with backgrounds of little education, and women workers minority at the mines. The risk of enduring stress while also being a minority may be high as well. Such types of risks may seem only light and draw little attention to the realities faced by individual women working in the field but it is very important to know about them. The mining companies are very large with international status and it would be easy for them to try not to draw attention to a possible rape, as an example, in their own workplace in order to maintain their reputation. At Saturviit many are also aware of the concern expressed by Inuit workers at the mine about their treatment by non-Inuit workers. It has been heard that many Inuit do not maintain their jobs at the mine due to the impressions of racism and that they go through stress due to that. Therefore we request that there be an ombudsman created on behalf of Inuit workers. The ombudsman would be an outside and neutral person who would be able to receive complaints and make investigations about complaints. This ombudsman should be created to provide protection to Inuit women, to give them a fair voice in the face of large mining companies, and to give a fair voice to Inuit workers who feel discrimination in the workplace and for their safety and security as well as the nearby local population

Aside from the social issues just mentioned, Saturviit also has a suggestion to make regarding environment in general. Plan Nunavik does not mention the PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT and Saturviit suggests that it be given space in the Plan Nunavik document. It is also suggested that a sort of consortium be created, one that would oversee environmental protection in general. It is clear that there are institutions dedicated to environmental issues such as Kativik Regional Government, which obtains public funds for projects to do with environment. There is however no independent body overseeing issues regarding the protection of the environment in Nunavik. There exists one that is named Avataq in Greenland, one that gives voice to the importance of protecting environment in the face of mining industries and governments whose goals are driven by the imperative of economic growth.

Parnasimautik Consultation Process

An important point about the Plan Nunavik is the necessity to know about it. As mentioned, Saturviit went through this document at our last board meeting. For many it takes time and requires a certain interest to really pick up the book and

read it. Many will have read it but as it is for many people it may not be easy to actually sit down with the book and go through it. For Saturviit, we took a whole day to go through most of the chapters during our board meeting. And we have yet to go through others. Knowledge, the necessity of being informed should be encouraged in all of the communities. With this in mind, it is important to inform people of developments as they occur by bringing the knowledge to them by way of information sessions.

Information sessions will educate Inuit about Plan Nunavik, which brings up the issue of education and of concerns attached to it. In addition to knowing about Plan Nunavik, we also felt there was a need for more knowledge about mining in particular. How do people know about mining for example? The difference between exploration and exploitation, how much exploration is actually going on, and what are the deals that mining companies have with communities, as an example what are the contents of the Raglan Agreement? Where are these companies, and who are the companies that might do projects in Nunavik? How is the material they mine used, what techniques do they use to exploit the mineral ore and so on; there is general lack of information for Inuit to be really acquainted with the issues at hand and to be able to make informed opinions about them. With the mining industry making many advances to the north now it is essential that knowledge about mining be brought to the communities.

I believe that this process of exchanging or sharing our thoughts on what direction we would like to see our own strategy in the face of development in the North is positive and leads to a common goal. While elected leaders are also responsible for giving direction to this type of strategy, it is also important that locally, Inuit are encouraged to discuss these issues. Having basic knowledge about what is going on is a good step. I suggest that local involvement be encouraged and that individuals interested in learning more about Quebec's economic strategy, mining in general, and environment, be encouraged to get together to hold information sessions and to discuss these issues locally.

Lastly, the question of what we would like to achieve out of this meeting is a good question to look at. Do we wish the Parnasimautik/Plan Nunavik document to be a statement of all the needs that have not yet been addressed properly in Nunavik? Housing, education, Youth Protection for children, social issues and problems, energy needs, transportation routes and so on? I believe we can take this opportunity to make a Nunavik Inuit statement on mining by creating a mining policy, like the Crees have done and like Nunavut has done. For example the question on uranium mining in Nunavik, do we accept the exploitation of uranium in our territory, or should we not accept the exploitation of uranium in our territory? We should be discussing this question and others in the communities. But to do this we must open up dialogue and debate about such questions. A mining

policy should be formulated with the participation of the population by creating an open dialogue. If not, a mining policy written without Inuit participation has the risk of being created within the confines of the interests of only one sector of Inuit society. An example of this is Makivik Corporation, which works for the economic interests of Nunavik as a region. Since Makivik is interested in mining and enters into agreements with mining companies for the economic interests of Nunavik, this is where its best interests lie. Not in how Inuit may think about uranium mining or other types of development activities that may present risks of social and environmental impacts. A mining policy should be created with the participation of local Inuit through clear, informed, open discussions.

Conclusion

The above issues have been brought up along with suggestions and recommendations because if there are to be economic benefits, social benefits should not be left behind. The social problems cannot be ignored while industries work to exploit the region for profit. Royalties obtained from the mining industry benefit the Inuit communities but it cannot only be for the enrichment of infrastructure or of obtaining material things. The social issues must be tackled at the same time otherwise the gap between haves and have-nots will continue to grow. A mining project must bring socio-economic benefits for the community or communities they are closest to. Economic prosperity must go hand in hand with social responsibility.

Lisa Koperqualuk
President
Saturviit Inuit Women's Association