

# UNAC NEWS

FALL 2008



## CIRCUMPOLAR CHALLENGES ISSUE



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## Circumpolar challenges ahead as ice vanishes

By Ken Coates  
and Bill Morisson

Recently, the Far North of Canada and the other circumpolar nations have come to the forefront of world attention, largely because of the retreat of Arctic ice due to global warming and the prospect of developing major oil and gas reserves in the region.

While nations rush to extend or solidify their claims to Arctic territories, the condition of the northern Indigenous populations has attracted less notice. For hundreds of years, the Inuit of northern Canada have lived successfully in one of the globe's most challenging environments. More recently, however, Inuit communities have been wracked by social crisis, economic hardship and cultural malaise. Although Canada is one of the richest nations on earth, questions remain about the country's willingness and ability to ensure that the Inuit meet the standards of the UN Millennium Development Goals, thus maintaining the ability to flourish

in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The UN Millennium Development Goals established a powerful agenda for social and economic change, calling for an end to hunger and poverty, ensuring environmental sustainability, control of HIV/AIDS, improved child and maternal health, gender equality, universal education and the development of global partnerships to these commitments permanent. In Canada, federal, territorial and Inuit governments provide a wide range of education, health, and economic services, as well as programs designed to strengthen Inuit culture and language. Compared to the poorest parts of the world, the Inuit are doing relatively well, certainly much better than the indigenous peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. Compared to the rest of Canada, however, Inuit



The city of Iqaluit, in Canada's Nunavut territory

communities lag well behind virtually every measure of socio-economic development.

There have been promising developments in some areas, such as the campaigns to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, the development of political and economic power and leadership for women, improved health care services, adjustment in legal and prison systems to accommodate

*...continued on p. 3-4*

throughout the Circumpolar World. There has also been much progress in the creation and empowerment of Inuit-dominated or -influenced governments in the Northwest Territo-

## Refusal to adopt UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous



By **Mitzi Brown**

Canada shocked and offended Aboriginal people in this country when it voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration was first drafted in 1983 by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and Canadians took a leading role in its formation. On September 13, 2007, it was ratified by the UN General Assembly with a vote of 144-4.

The non-binding Declaration has been viewed as a first step towards justice and a rallying point for change in the treatment of Indigenous peoples by nation states around the world. Stephen Harper has yet again disappointed Aboriginal people by going against this Declaration.

The lengthy document was hailed by leaders of the over 370 million Indigenous peoples around the world as a historic victory for human rights of the most oppressed peoples. Included in the Declaration are recognitions of human rights and freedoms of Indigenous peoples. Some of these rights include

self-determination, collective rights to ownership use and control lands and natural resources. As well, rights to maintaining their own political, religious, cultural and educational institutions and protection of cultural and intellectual property. One fundamental right outlined is that Indigenous peoples should be consulted and permission should be acquired from them before any activities happen on their lands.

The Declaration also calls for fair compensation for violation of the rights listed in the Declaration and guarantees against ethnocide and genocide. Lastly, it provides fair procedures to resolve conflicts between Indigenous peoples and States.

Canada had been involved in the process from the beginning and the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc Quebecois have condemned the actions of the Harper Government.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs on its website states that one of the reasons Canada rejected the Declaration was because "... to be truly effective, a Declaration must clearly set out expectations for the States in which Indigenous peoples live. Unfortunately, portions of the text presented to the Human Rights Council did not meet this test." Indian Affairs goes on to state that as Canada expressed to the Human Rights Council, the current provisions on lands and resources are unclear and open to a variety of in-

terpretations. They could be interpreted to support claims to ownership of lands that were ceded legally through treaties. As well, it was argued by the Canadian delegation that this Declaration could hinder land claims processes already being negotiated where Indigenous land and resources rights are balanced with rights of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The Indian Affairs Department also states that the concept of free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous peoples in the Draft could be seen as veto power over administrative matters, legislation development proposals and national defense activities which concern non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization that represents Inuit in Canada has responded to Canada's rejection of the Declaration. Mary Simon who is the President said, "Inuit are disappointed with the Government of Canada's decision to vote against this historic declaration.

This negative vote is also a black mark on the governments of the four countries that voted against the Declaration, and puts them out of step with the strengthening of human rights around the world. Notwithstanding, I have no doubt this Declaration is supported by the vast majority of my fellow Canadians."

Simon concluded, "Let us

**"rights include self-determination, collective rights to ownership use and control lands and natural resources."**

## Peoples a black mark on Canada: Native Leaders

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Simon concluded, “Let us now turn to the future by building on the solid foundation of this Declaration. For our part, Inuit will use the Declaration to promote the ongoing enjoyment of our

fundamental rights and betterment of our living circumstances in our Arctic homeland.”

This issue has been identified by the Inuit community as a voting issue for Inuit in the next Federal election. The ITK has posed 12 questions to political party leaders that they deem important to Inuit, included in them is do they endorse the UN Declaration.

There has been a vociferous response from human rights, legal and Native leaders in Canada opposing Canada’s refusal to adopt the Declaration. A group of legal experts and scholars have written a letter to the Canadian gov-

ernment outlining their disappointment.

*Mitzi Brown is an Inuit writer from Nunatsiavut, Newfoundland and Labrador who now makes her home in Toronto. She has worked in the Aboriginal community for many years and is a recent Honours Bachelor of Arts graduate from the University of Toronto with double majors in Equity and Women’s Studies.*

**“There has been a vociferous response from human rights, legal and Native leaders in Canada opposing Canada’s refusal to adopt the Declaration.”**

## Continued from first page: Circumpolar Challenges Ahead

Indigenous values, and Inuit engagement with their counterparts throughout the Circumpolar World. There has also been much progress in the creation and empowerment of Inuit-dominated or -influenced governments in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern Quebec. Recent attention to global warming has sparked an escalation in Arctic environmental research and at least some promise of ameliorating the harm associated with climate change.

These developments have, however, been offset by continued high levels of unemployment, a region-wide housing shortage, exceptional challenges in elementary and secondary education, and con-

tinued threats to the sustainability of Inuit culture and languages. Incarceration rates remain very high by Canadian standards, as do the incidence of violent death, suicide, sexually transmitted disease and teenage pregnancy. The full impact of North American popular culture can be seen throughout the region, and few Inuit youth retain traditional language and cultural skills. While officials can point to significant improvements in life expectancy, more accessible post-secondary education, lower infant mortality rates and creative political reforms, they also acknowledge that other problems defy easy resolution.

Money, while never enough to meet all of the Inuit needs, is not the major issue in the Canadian North. Few if any regions in the world receive as much in the way of state subsidies as do the governments and people of the Far North in Canada. The sums spent on Inuit programs are eroded by the cruel combination of vast distances, harsh climates and tiny populations (Nunavut, the Inuit-controlled territory in the Eastern Arctic, has only 31,000 people in two million sq. km.) Nonetheless, the Government of Canada and the territorial governments provide substantial amounts of money for most of the services required in

the region. There is a major shortfall in funding for Arctic housing, a situation further complicated by long-standing debates about private home ownership and collective responsibilities in Indigenous communities. Nowhere more than in the Far North is it clear that Canada has long used government funding as a surrogate for state and national commitment to Indigenous peoples. Yet the fundamental problems facing the Inuit do not lie with the national government.

The Inuit, for example, continue to face formidable economic challenges. The cost of living in the Arctic is extremely high, a situa-

## Continued from last page: Circumpolar challenges ahead

tion made worse by rising fuel prices and limited direct government subsidies for private sector workers in the region. The decline of the northern fur trade, exacerbated by a culturally-insensitive anti-fur trading campaign based in Europe, has all but eliminated a traditional cornerstone of Inuit economic independence. Resource developments, particularly diamond mines, have been structured to provide employment and training for the Inuit, and land claims agreements assure Inuit governments of a share in the royalty revenue from future development. But with basic educational attainment running well behind national norms and with little investment capital available in the region, few local residents have been able to capitalize on the opportunities. The largest employment field in the North is in government services, a poor foundation for long-term economic sustainability.

The greatest promise for improvement in Inuit circumstances – with the potential to address the Millennium goals in a systematic manner – is the political empowerment of the North. The establishment of Nunavut, an Inuit-controlled territory, in 1999, represented a major advance. The incorporation of Indigenous principles into the governance of Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec) and the Northwest Territories ensured a prominent place for Aboriginal peoples. Still, major challenges remain. The defining Nunavut land claim settlement remains substantially incomplete, leaving the Inuit without the full range of control and responsibility that they desire and need. The same holds for all of the modern Indigenous agreements in the North. The local population feels much more urgency about these matters than does the Government of Canada. The Inuit understand that government funding and government-imposed initiatives are not a permanent solution to their

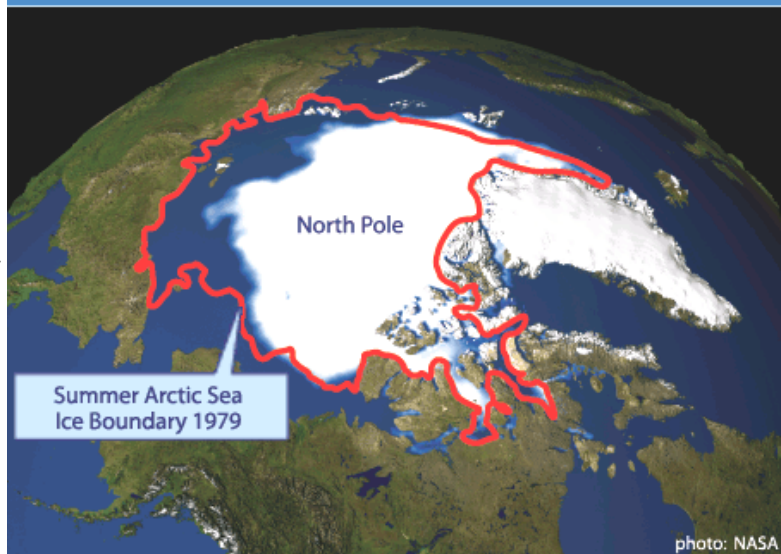
long-term problems. Instead, local responsibility and freedom of action, combined with sufficient funding, will allow for the steady improvement of Inuit life.

The Inuit in Canada face continuing challenges in the effort to reach the standards

outlined in the UN Millennium Development Goals. Major steps have been taken through devolution and land claims agreements. The emergence of powerful and influential regional, national and Circumpolar Indigenous organizations has given the Inuit crucial connections and the opportunity for joint action. Funding is available at a level that, even when offset by high Arctic costs, would impress most outside observers. The task of overcoming cultural domination, colonial regulation, devastation by imported diseases and economic dislocation, however, is profoundly difficult and will not be achieved quickly. On balance, however, the Inuit of northern Canada provide more reasons for optimism than for despair. Their experience, energy, and ingenuity over the past thirty years provide useful models for other minority and Indigenous groups seeking to secure a greater measure of social justice, economic balance, political stability and local control.

*Ken Coates grew up in the Yukon, Bill Morrison in southern Ontario. Together they have written several books*

Since 1979, more than 20 percent of the polar ice cap has melted away.



*on northern subjects, most recently 'Strange Things Done: Murder in Yukon History' (04) and 'Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon'. Their latest book is 'Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North', to be published October 2008.*

## Ban Ki-Moon offers to host summit on global financial crisis

Oct. 18 -- United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today offered to host an international summit on the financial crisis at UN headquarters in New York City by early December.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has been pushing for a global conference as soon as next month to overhaul the world's financial system and prevent a repeat of the credit crunch that sparked the biggest stock-market selloff since the Great Depression. EU members on Oct. 16 backed his proposal and today he travels to Camp David, Maryland, to meet with

U.S. President George W. Bush.

"We both agree that there is no time to lose, and therefore, I fully subscribe to your idea," Ban wrote in a letter to Sarkozy after meeting with him earlier today at Sommet de la Francophonie, a summit of French-speaking countries in Quebec City. A copy of the letter was distributed to reporters at the event.

The emergency conference would include leaders of the Group of Eight leading industrialized countries, together with the UN secretary-general

and the heads of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Ban said in the letter.

Besides the U.S. and France, the G8 includes Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the U.K.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said yesterday he agreed to back Sarkozy's proposal for an international financial summit.

*UN Newswire*

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## Advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council

**By Marcie Hawranik**

I spent this past summer working for the non-governmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch in Geneva, Switzerland. My job was to attend the UN Human Rights Council and to conduct research regarding the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

The role of Human Rights Watch and every other international NGO at the Human Rights Council centers on advocacy. Advocacy is one tool in the duty of regime creation of non-governmental organizations. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an NGO that acts to create an array of regimes at any given time. The international system is composed of a multitude of interlocking regimes governing state behavior and dictating international norms and standards. An example of a 'regime' could be the UN Laws of the Seas, the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women or even the concept of gender mainstreaming.

There are many steps that outline regime creation as explained by John Mathiason in his book 'Invisible Governance.' The first two steps of regime creation include raising the salience of a problem and defining its parameters. HRW-Geneva raises the salience of a problem and defines the parameters of an issue through its three departments. The three main departments at HRW are 1) advocacy department, 2) development & outreach, and 3) refugee policy program. My internship is in the advocacy department which primarily focuses within the UN system through the human rights council.

The research department conducts

fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses in all regions of the world. HRW will publish the findings into dozens of books and reports each year which will generate extensive coverage in local, national and international media. This publicity helps to embarrass abusive governments in the eyes of their citizens and the world.

HRW also meets with government officials to urge policy and practice changes in the UN, EU and in nation capitols around the world. I was able to work with other non-governmental organizations to develop common advocacy strategies to pressure governments. The advantage of operating as an NGO in the human rights field is that HRW can focus on creating any number of regimes at any time and use one as momentum to leverage another.

HRW also organized a number of side events during the Human Rights Council in collaboration with a number of other NGOs. I aided in the organization of these sessions and arranged meetings with visiting political activists and country diplomats.

HRW faces challenges when raising the salience of a problem. This proves to be difficult when there is no consensual agreement as to what the parameters of an issue or what the appropriate body to remedy it would look like. For example debates in the Human Rights Council on 'gender integration' consist of state diplomats debating over what 'gender' means.

HRW has always taken a name and shame reactive approach to advocacy at the UN. HRW will research a particular issue in a country, present it publicly and then request to meet with the country diplomat to discuss the issue. This reactive approach has

not always been successful and caused HRW to change focus and develop a new advocacy strategy.

The new advocacy strategy is characterized by a longer-term more general dialogue with country diplomats. The new strategy will engage county diplomats to discuss broader issues such as how to make the Human Rights Council more effective and discuss issues their country faces and how they can be remedied in the eyes of the international community. This longer-term dialogue aims to educate and promote stronger relationships with country representatives.

HRW is an extremely effective organization that is ever-changing to adapt to the on-going politicization of the Human Rights Council. Bloc voting, alliance-building and the United States withdrawal from the Human Rights Council all contribute to its on-going politicization. HRW has observed and analyzed this destructive process and adapted to create its new advocacy strategy that is more constructive. My internship at HRW was extremely enlightening and introduced me to human rights at the United Nations.

*Marcie is a UNAC-Winnipeg board member.*