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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

Standing Committee on National Defence

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•(0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Let us begin our 37th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, February 23, 2009, we continue our study on Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

[English]

I'm very pleased to have with us some witnesses from the Qikiqtani Inuit Association and from Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated: John Amagoalik, George Eckalook, and John Merritt.

Thank you very much for being with us.

I will give the floor first to Mr. Amagoalik. If you would like to introduce the people with you, please go ahead.

Mr. John Amagoalik (Executive Policy Advisor, Qikiqtani Inuit Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is John Amagoalik. I'm the policy advisor to the executive of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, one of three designated Inuit organizations in Nunavut.

If you look at the map, Nunavut covers about 40% of the land mass of the whole country. QIA is responsible for approximately 50% of the land mass of Nunavut and about 52% of the population live in our region.

With us today is John Merritt. He's the lawyer for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. He'll answer any legal or constitutional questions you may have.

George Eckalook is acting president of our Inuit organization and he'll be making the opening statements. Elizabeth Roberts will do the interpretation.

George will be speaking in Inuktitut during his opening statement.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Eckalook.

[English]

Mr. George Eckalook (Acting President, Qikiqtani Inuit Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm really pleased to be here and for the invitation to the Nunavut Qikiqtani Inuit Association.

As John Amagoalik said, I'm the acting president right now.

I will be speaking mostly in Inuktitut. I'm really poor in speaking and understanding English.

I really appreciate your inviting us to be here. You already have my presentation in Inuktitut and in English.

Depending on the time we have this morning, I'll talk more about the High Arctic. I'm from Resolute Bay in the High Arctic. We've protected the Queen Elizabeth Islands since 1953 and 1955. I'm originally from northern Quebec in Inukjuak. That's my hometown.

But we were relocated to the High Arctic by the federal government in 1955. My parents are in the High Arctic. That's where we are right now. I grew up in the High Arctic, and that's now my hometown. Whole families are up in the High Arctic right now.

I would like to give you more details about the High Arctic, where we were located by the federal government in 1953 and 1955. It's really important to us to notify the federal government. That's why this morning I would like to explain how difficult life in the High Arctic is. We've been in the community for a little more than 60 years.

Mr. Chairman, I would rather speak in Inuktitut.

Our interpreter hasn't shown up yet. I think they're on the way.

•(0915)

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you want to interpret for George?

You will translate? Yes?

Okay.

Mr. George Eckalook (Interpretation): You pay a very high sacrifice by living in the High Arctic. Being brought up in that general area was very difficult. Just to come here and make a presentation cost me \$5,000.

Having been relocated up to the High Arctic by the federal government, I can tell you that it's overwhelming and costly. Having to go from place to place, to the communities up there, is exhausting. To purchase fuel and gas in order to survive up there is very costly.

Keep in mind that we are people up there, and we would like to get some kind of recognition and have it kept in mind that we're part of Canada up in the High Arctic. It's not a fun situation to have grown up there.

[Witness continues in English]

Mr. Chairman, our living is really difficult. To use the example of gasoline, the price is really high, \$1.2520 a litre, and diesel costs us \$1.1920 a litre. So it's really very expensive for our equipment

Also, Mr. Chairman, to give a few more examples, we have only one store, a co-op store, with really expensive groceries. For example, two litres of milk is \$8.49, and the bread is \$4.69. The eggs are \$5.89. Those items I've mentioned, we buy them and we use them every day. It's really difficult to live with that.

We also get the machines from down south. The machines that we use cost about \$10,000 for the skidoos or four-wheelers, and on top of that is freight of \$3,000 or \$4,000. That's really difficult for the hunters. It's really expensive. In terms of shipping, the road is only for freight. We use the boat to ship, and also First Air. Those are the only two we use for anything, for transportation. It's not like down south.

[Witness continues in Inuktitut with interpretation]

The people in Resolute are struggling right now....

Sorry; I'm one of the descendants.

They really don't understand what their values are up there. They don't understand what their purpose is up there.

Our parents, grandparents, are buried, frozen up there. We loved them very much....

[Witness continues in English]

I'm so sorry, Mr. Chairman; really we are a family up there.

Today our complaint is to the federal government to recognize the people up there. There are only three people left from the original 1950 group that was located in the High Arctic. We have only one elder left. He's still alive. We ask the federal government to talk with him and apologize to him. That's all we ask and ask....

I'm sorry, but we are so sad about it. It's really difficult to explain to you. We're sorry about that, but for us who live up there in the High Arctic, it's really just so sad. It's difficult to explain it to others.

Also, Mr. Chairman, our little family up there has grown up there, were born up there. They are going to live there forever, so we've got to be with them. We ask the federal government to recognize it more...*[Inaudible—Editor]*...to Resolute. That's all we've been asking for.

As I said earlier, it's really expensive to live up there. Also, three months a year there is 24-hour sunlight, and the dark season lasts almost six to eight months, so it's really difficult to live there.

• (0925)

Mr. John Amagoalik: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I want to talk a bit about what we are attempting to do up there. As George has explained, the families living up there are not there by their choice; they were relocated by the Government of Canada in 1953 and 1955. Most of the adults have returned to northern Quebec or have died. The second and third generations are still living up there. They still consider themselves guardians of the High Arctic islands. We consider the Northwest Passage internal waters, and it's a position that we're not prepared to abandon.

I'd also like to mention a study that we carried out back in 1973 or 1974, which was called the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project. It was done by a professor from Calgary, and it showed just how much the Inuit used and occupied the lands and waters of the Arctic. I think you all would be very surprised to see how much land use and occupancy there actually is. When you look at the study, almost every square kilometre of this territory is covered by land use by Inuit people, and it has been like that for thousands and thousands of years. So there's no question that we use the Arctic every single day.

There are also three or four projects that I want to mention. We have been working with Parks Canada over the past couple of years to work out a memorandum of understanding for a national marine conservation area for Lancaster Sound. Lancaster Sound is the Northwest Passage and we're trying to do a study on creating a national marine conservation area for the eastern part of Lancaster Sound.

We're also in discussions with Parks Canada to negotiate the creation of a national park on north Bathurst Island. North Bathurst Island is part of the famous Polar Bear Pass.

We have also been in discussions with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on possible marine protection areas, which I believe are under the Oceans Act.

We're trying our very best to implement the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Unfortunately, the NTI is in court. They have taken the Government of Canada to court because they feel that the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement has not been implemented properly.

As I said, relocation is a big issue in the two communities that are on the Northwest Passage—Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord. We negotiated a compensation package with the Government of Canada back in the 1990s. We were also asking for an apology from the Government of Canada, which to us was more important than the compensation. That apology has not been forthcoming, and as long as we don't have that apology, we still consider the case to be open. We will continue to work for an apology as long as it's not forthcoming.

I think we've probably gone over our five- or six-minute time limit, so we'll leave it at that for now. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Wilfert, for seven minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you for coming. I realize this is a very emotional, a very personal, issue for all of you. I have been struck, very clearly, by a number of your comments.

In 1993 the Parliament of Canada passed the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act. In 2006 court action was taken, given the failure to implement it. Can you briefly indicate what the key issues are regarding that failure to implement the act?

Going through the courts, of course, is always the most expensive and most time-consuming way. Surely there is a methodology we could use to deal with something that is constitutionally protected and was passed by Parliament in 1993. That would be my first question.

The second one is on the issue of relocation to the far north, which we'll come back to.

Then I think Ms. Neville has a question.

• (0930)

Mr. John Merritt (Legal Counsel, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): Thank you, sir, for that question.

Just as a background point, members may recall that I was here a few weeks ago with Mary Simon, the president of ITK. I actually split my time between the ITK and NTI. The Inuit practise a very effective form of federalism, and that's why I'm able to do those two things and work for the two organizations at the same time.

In terms of your particular question, yes, NTI brought a comprehensive court case in 2006. That court case asserts that the crown, represented by the Government of Canada, is in breach of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement on 39 different points. The case is before the courts, so you will understand why I don't want to offer too much detail.

In terms of the most important issues in the case, I will bring two to your attention.

The first is that article 23 in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement says that the crown has to work with the Inuit to try to make sure that the workforce in Nunavut reflects the population, so that there is a representative workforce in the public sector. Of course, by working on that on the public sector side, you also create education and skills for the private sector. So according to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the federal government should be working towards a workforce in Nunavut that is 85% Inuit. Since 1999 the ratio of Inuit in the government workforce in Nunavut has been below 50%. What's more disturbing is that the number is not increasing.

There was a mediation report done by former Justice Thomas Berger. In the spring of 2006, he recommended specific training and education measures that all parties should adopt. Nunavut Tunngavik endorsed the report within weeks of it being made public. Unfortunately, the crown has essentially gone sideways on it. We don't yet know whether the Government of Canada will commit to the Berger mediation report. It was the frustration at the lack of response to the report that actually triggered the commencement of the lawsuit.

The only other thing I'll add, if I have another moment, is that the dispute resolution system is not working in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. It's not working in any of the major land claims agreements. The Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples completed a report last year that stated that the implementation policy of the federal government should be fundamentally revised and that there should be an objective way of resolving disputes so people don't have to go to court.

In the case of Nunavut, NTI has referred 17 different issues for arbitration, and the federal government has rejected all 17. From

NTI's point of view, this isn't a very satisfactory way of conducting business. On the other hand, when litigation is the only option available, that's the option people are compelled to use.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: So 17 were sent to arbitration, and all have been rejected?

Mr. John Merritt: That's right, sir.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That sounds like a staggering number.

On what basis were they rejected, in general?

Mr. John Merritt: Clearly you'd have to ask a representative of the Government of Canada to give a full explanation. We speculate on the Inuit side of the equation. Our reading tends to be that an arbitrator can come back with a decision you don't like, so why take the chance if you can just veto it in the first instance?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That's a hell of a way to run a country, isn't it?

Mr. John Merritt: I would agree with that.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Well, I'll give them to Ms. Neville then.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): You can keep going, because I want my whole five minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Fine.

On the issue of the relocation to the north and the apology, what avenues have you taken to seek that apology, and what are the stumbling blocks? We seem to have announced apologies for various issues over the years and this one, obviously, has been very central to your comments.

Mr. John Amagoalik: We've tried to use every avenue to gain an apology from the Government of Canada. We have appeared before various parliamentary committees to tell our story; we told the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 10 or 15 years ago; and through our members of Parliament, we've been lobbying the government for a number of years.

As I mentioned, we were able to come to an agreement on a compensation package 10 or 15 years ago, but we've been trying to use all avenues to gain an apology—appearing before parliamentary committees, through our members of Parliament, through the media.

As everyone knows, governments are always very reluctant to apologize. I guess it's because they're afraid it will lead to other things. But we have never been given a clear explanation of why that apology is not forthcoming.

• (0935)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I assume that you would expect an apology to be announced formally in Parliament, presumably by the government, the Prime Minister, as we did for the residential schools issue.

Mr. John Amagoalik: We do feel that the apology should come from the Prime Minister of Canada. Whether it's done in the House or on a special occasion arranged for the relocatees, we feel that the Prime Minister has to be the person to make this apology.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Okay.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I would like to welcome our Inuit friends. Having been close to this matter for several years, I feel that I have been a kind of witness to the First Nations' and Inuit's uprising. I have to say that governments, especially the Canadian government, are quick to sign agreements and then equally quick to go back on them.

Personally, I was having this kind of conversation with my colleagues at a time when First Nations were forced to go to court to get justice. Now, Federal Court or Supreme Court of Canada decisions run about 50% in favour of aboriginal peoples and Inuit. Yet, despite that, it is still difficult to have decisions implemented because the government does not implement them. So the situation is quite disgusting.

Mr. Amagoalik, I have read part of your book *Changing the Face of Canada*. You were only five years old when you were deported. I have to use that term. When you live in Nunavik, in Inukjuak to be precise, and you are moved 1,500, maybe 2,000 kilometres to the north, to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, I have no other word but "deportation". A whole chapter of the Erasmus-Dussault Commission report dealt with that injustice. I agree with you that apologies are needed from both Conservative and Liberal governments, yet you are still waiting. The event took place in 1953, so there has been plenty of time to examine the issue and move forward.

But why do you think the deportation took place, Mr. Amagoalik? I want to assure you that Bloc Québécois MPs feel that the matter of Arctic sovereignty needs Inuit. Nothing can be solved in the Arctic with frigates, destroyers, satellites and the army. We feel that the solution lies in friendly and appropriate agreements with Inuit.

You were five at the time. Could you explain to us what your perception of that event is today? Why did Canada do it? Is it just us a question of sovereignty? I agree with you: you really need an apology from the Prime Minister.

• (0940)

[English]

Mr. John Amagoalik: As to commitments that have not been fulfilled, I think Canada's history is full of examples. Ever since Canada became a nation, the government has signed treaties, signed agreements, and made commitments to the aboriginal people. There's a long history of broken promises and commitments not kept. Unfortunately, this is a continuation of that. We hope eventually that it will end.

As for the relocation, the Government of Canada recognized a long time ago that one of the main reasons for it was to assert Canadian sovereignty in that part of the country. We were chosen because we were 2,000 kilometres away, and we couldn't just pick up our belongings, get on the dog team, and go home. We couldn't do that. The two communities of Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord occupy a strategic position along the Northwest Passage, and I think that's why we were put in these locations.

The Government of Canada made attempts to relocate some Inuit from the communities of Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay, close by to the Northwest Passage. If they didn't like what was happening, they could just get on the komatik and go home. We couldn't do that because it was 2,000 kilometres to home. The Government of Canada has now admitted that sovereignty was an important part of the relocation project.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Correct me if I am wrong, but your way of life in Nunavik was far different from the new way of life that you had to get used to in Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord. Further south, you had different food and your culture was different; two thousand kilometres further north, the land was almost barren.

Was there loss of life to any extent? People were just left on the ice. Were there a lot of people who did not survive the deportation?

[English]

Mr. John Amagoalik: The two oldest people did not survive the first two winters. In Grise Fiord, Dera Elter, the community leader, did not last one year. In the community of Resolute Bay, our matriarch died soon after the move had been made. The graves of those people are there.

A number of people did not survive the first couple of years, because those years were extremely difficult. At the time, climate change had not taken place and the High Arctic was extremely cold. I remember landing in Resolute for the first time in late August and it was just like landing on the moon. There was no vegetation as far as the eye could see, just sand and gravel.

In those days, it was different from what it is now. It was a whole different world. Canada was different. The whole world was different. There was a different attitude then. I don't see this sort of thing happening today, because the people of Canada would not stand for it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Now...

[English]

Did you want to add something?

Mr. George Eckalook: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to add to what John Amagoalik said.

We have two next-door neighbours who are looked after by the federal government. That's Alert and Eureka. Their treatment is really good because their employer is the federal government. Anything they run out of—food or whatever they need—they get transported up there to help them out. The treatment is different. When we talk about Resolute people, Inuit people, the treatment is different. That's why we've been asking the federal government to recognize the Inuit people. For our two next-door neighbours, Eureka and Alert, the treatment is really good. They have employment and they make good money. All the food and expenses are paid, the transportation is paid, and if they have a family down south they get paid.

So the treatment is different. Depending on where the federal government has located the Inuit people, the treatment is different. That's what we are complaining about.

Our people, our parents, the ones I mentioned earlier, are buried and frozen in the ground. We're not going to leave them alone. We're going to live up there. Right now our families live up there. There are more people who were born up there. It's their hometown now. We've been asking the federal government to recognize the people up there.

They talk about Lancaster Sound and the Northwest Passage. They talk about animals. They want to protect them really good, just like a soft pillow. But they never mention anything about us, the Inuit people. They relocate us.

Like I said earlier, we don't even know what we're doing up there, what we're protecting up there. It's a big island, half of Nunavut, when you look at the map. It's really important to us, to our people, that Inuit people live there.

Let's negotiate something better. That's what we're asking for.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Eckalook.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, all of you, for coming. I want to join in welcoming you to our committee.

The topic is very moving and emotional. I can understand the importance of it, and not only from what you've told us today.

I was present in Nain, Labrador, in 2005, at the signing of the Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the formal signing, and the creation of Nunatsiavut. At the time, there was also an apology ceremony. Premier Williams apologized, on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, for the forceable move south of two Inuit communities to a place where they did not wish to be.

I can tell everybody here that it was an extremely moving apology, and it was very, very clear from the reaction of the people involved how important it was to them and what a striking reaction—an emotional, physical reaction—resulted from that.

So I understand that, and I support your request for an apology.

I also want to say, and I said this before when Mary Simon was here, that I find it quite distressing and disturbing, as a member of Parliament and as a Canadian, to see the apparent, total bad faith in which the land claims agreement is being implemented. I discussed it with one of the witnesses after one of the recent appearances. She described the government as treating the land claims agreement as a divorce where you take the money and go, when it really should be a marriage where you become partners on the basis of an agreement on how you go forward.

I think it's a good way of putting it. It seems to me to be great bad faith. That, obviously, is something I'm concerned about.

I know how important the role of the Inuit at Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord has been to the declaration of sovereignty, but I was interested, Mr. Amagoalik, in your comment that the second and third generations that are still up in the High Arctic wish to continue to play the role of guardians of the north.

Are you saying that they wish to stay where they are and are willing and want to continue to play the role of guardians of the north? Could you elaborate a little bit on that?

And if you want to comment on the other issue, about a marriage versus a divorce, please feel free to do so.

• (0950)

Mr. John Amagoalik: We consider the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement to be a living document. Too many times treaties are signed, they're put in a file in a filing cabinet, and they're forgotten about. We feel that the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement has to be a living agreement. It has to be implemented properly. We want to see our agreement treated as a living document.

What was the second part of your question?

Mr. Jack Harris: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe you said that the second and third generations up in the High Arctic are satisfied to continue to act as guardians of the north. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. John Amagoalik: The explanation is that the second and third generations of people who were relocated there were born up there. They don't know any other place. To them, this is home, as George has said many times now. They have no other place to go, because they were born up there, and it's the only thing they know.

I think that the attitude of people living in those two communities is very positive. They feel that they contribute to the sovereignty of this country, and they're proud of that. We consider ourselves guardians of the High Arctic because our ancestors are buried there, and our descendants are continuing to live in those communities and are helping the country assert its sovereignty in the Northwest Passage.

To answer your question, I think the people living in those communities are prepared to live up there for the rest of their lives, and they feel that their contribution is important.

Mr. Jack Harris: The follow-up question for me, of course, is what do they hope to have in the response from Canada in return? I think we probably have that answer in your presentation in terms of becoming partners with the Inuit in asserting the sovereignty of the Arctic and working on the recommendations that were presented by Mary Simon.

Am I right about that?

Mr. John Amagoalik: Yes, you are.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Now I will give the floor to Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the representatives for being here this morning and for your very helpful presentations.

I wanted to start with a question pertaining to geography, if I could. Could you either explain or point out on the map where the Qikqitani region is?

Mr. John Amagoalik: As I said, there are three regions in Nunavut. The western part covers this area. That's the Kitikmeot Inuit Association region.

The Kivalliq region is down here in this region.

The region that we represent includes Sanikiluaq, way down at Hudson Bay. It includes the community on those islands all the way to James Bay. It also includes all the islands north of the mainland, so it represents approximately 50% to 51% of the land mass of Nunavut.

Mr. Peter Braid: I'm sorry, which percentage?

Mr. John Amagoalik: About 51%.

Mr. Peter Braid: About 51%, okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Amagoalik.

Secondly, moving on to the issue of the apology that you spoke about earlier and with respect to the compensation package in the 1990s that you negotiated and finalized, were you seeking the apology as part of those discussions at the time, and if so, what response did you receive?

● (0955)

Mr. John Amagoalik: The apology has always been part of our position. When we approached the Government of Canada to negotiate this compensation package, it included an apology. As I said, we worked out the compensation side of the agreement but the apology was just left hanging. No further discussions took place.

Mr. Peter Braid: Finally, on the importance of education for the Inuit people and increasing access through education and outcomes for education, do you know roughly what percentage of the Inuit population has a post-secondary education?

Mr. John Amagoalik: If I remember my statistics correctly, I think the last figure that we saw and we heard on the news was that approximately 32% of Inuit students make it through high school. As to post-secondary education, that percentage is even smaller. I think it's down to the mid-teens.

Post-secondary education achievements are low and high school graduation rates are still low, although they're improving a little bit each year.

Mr. Peter Braid: Moving further then, do you have any specific recommendations or can you subsequently provide any to the committee on how to increase those outcomes, both for high school education and then for post-secondary education as well?

Mr. John Amagoalik: It's the type of thing that takes years and perhaps generations to work out. We need more Inuktitut teachers. We need better infrastructure in our communities. We need things like harbours and wharves and hydro development.

The way to assert Canadian sovereignty is not necessarily through military equipment but to improve the lives of the people and improve the infrastructures of the communities that we live in. Even though the statistics are still not very good, in the ten or fifteen years that the territory has existed, those statistics have been improving very slowly.

It's progress, but it's slow.

Mr. Peter Braid: That small percentage of the Inuit population who actually receive a post-secondary education, how and where do they receive that education?

Mr. John Amagoalik: We have no university in the north. If anybody wants to go to university, they have to come south. We do have a post-secondary program called Nunavut Sivuniksavut, which operates here in Ottawa and is extremely successful. But all university students have to come south because there are no institutions in Nunavut that can teach to that level of education.

Mr. Peter Braid: Are there any challenges when Inuit students come south to receive their post-secondary education? Do they return to the north?

Mr. John Amagoalik: Most of them return. I think a very high percentage of students who come south for education do come back north to live. The problem they face down here is homesickness. They miss their food, they miss their families and friends. So that's the most difficult part of living down here and going to university.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will give the floor to Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all for being here today. I have had the privilege of visiting Resolute and look forward to another opportunity to go back.

I read the brief you presented and I was listening to Mr. Braid's questions about education. How important is the implementation of the recommendations by Thomas Berger in terms of asserting sovereignty through the Inuit community in the north?

● (1000)

Mr. John Amagoalik: It's our feeling that questions about sovereignty and about development always come back to the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. In important issues like sovereignty, we hope that the Government of Canada will recognize that implementing the land claims agreement is the best way to assert Canadian sovereignty. There are things like the creation of a marine council. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement calls for the creation of an Arctic marine council. That has not been done. If that was done, it could be used to deal with marine issues, and there are many marine issues in the Arctic, including the Northwest Passage.

We hope that the Government of Canada will recognize that the implementation of the land claims agreement is the best way to assert our sovereignty in that region.

Hon. Anita Neville: Has your organization in any way been consulted by the government in their northern initiatives to date?

Mr. John Amagoalik: The Government of Canada is consulting much more than they used to. I think many departments used to just keep doing whatever they had been doing for years and years out of habit, but in the last 10 years I think the different government departments have begun to realize that they really have to look at the words in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and that there's a duty for consultation, a commitment, legally, for consultation.

So there's a lot more consultation going on. I think things are improving in that area. We used to be totally ignored by government departments who didn't even know that people lived up there. The Arctic has always been described as a wasteland where nobody lives. Governments had that attitude for a very long time. Now they're realizing that it is not a wasteland and that there are people living up there and they have to be consulted. They have to be involved in whatever's happening up there.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Is there any recourse on the 17 issues that you have put forward for arbitration that have been rejected by the government? Are you looking at any kind of reconfiguration or reorganization of those issues to put the matters forward once again?

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you for that question.

I'll just recap how we ended up in litigation. The first proposal by NTI, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporation, was to negotiate the resolution of issues. The federal government withdrew its negotiator in 2004, and has refused to appoint a new negotiator.

The next opportunity was mediation. We did have Mr. Berger come in. He spent a year and a half—at the expense of the people of Canada—to put together a very fine report. That mediation report sits on a shelf.

NTI then suggested arbitration and suggested 17 issues.

Those were the three preferred mechanisms, or some combination of them, to resolve the issue short of a court case. The litigation only ensued when all those other avenues were blocked.

Would NTI be willing to negotiate towards finding a solution? Obviously that would be a political call, but in the absence of a negotiator, or any indication of willingness to implement a mediator's report or arbitration, clearly what NTI faces is a brick wall from the government side.

So I think there's a practical appetite to find an approach that works.

I should point out...and I'm sure Mr. Bachand knows this. It's my understanding that in northern Quebec, for example, the Crees have been in court for almost every year since 1975. So it's not like NTI feels it's been targeted for special indifference. There's a pattern there, and that pattern has been detected by not just the Senate committee on aboriginal peoples but also the Auditor General of Canada, who has said this approach to implementation isn't working and will lead to further problems.

• (1005)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Boughen, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Certainly let me add my voice to my colleagues' in welcoming you here this morning and thanking you for taking time to share with us your concerns.

I'm listening to the various issues you've raised, and I'm wondering what you would say are the main concerns of your people there. Is it education, is it health care, is it infrastructure, is it economic assistance programs? As a group that's working for the betterment of everyone, what would you say are your top priorities?

Mr. John Amagoalik: All of those things—health, education, economic development. They're all important issues to our people.

You probably know that suicide rates are extremely high, eight or nine times higher than the national average. As I said, education achievement levels are still very low. The health of our people from overcrowded houses in our small communities is a huge problem. The housing shortage is a huge problem.

All of those areas are our priorities. It's very difficult to pick one issue. They're all important.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much....

Yes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Excuse me, but I think Mr. Boughen was going to share his time with me.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Yes.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to our witnesses.

You described the high cost of common consumables where you live. The distance as well as the low density of the population both contribute to these hardships.

How welcoming is your community to the opening of the Canadian Northwest Passage for commercial traffic—excluding, of course, the regions that you want set aside for the purpose of marine and natural parks?

Mr. John Amagoalik: If the eventuality of commercial use of the Northwest Passage is to come, we want to be involved in how it happens. But first of all, we want to make it very clear to everyone that, as we said from the beginning, the Northwest Passage is internal waters. That is a position we are not prepared to compromise on.

The issue for us as far as the passage is concerned is to make sure the international community recognizes that Canada is responsible for that passage and has the responsibility for putting in regulations and measures to make sure that if commercial passage of ships does take place, it has to happen under conditions that are acceptable to the people living up there. We want to be involved in regulating ships. If they are going to use the Northwest Passage, there have to be conditions. We think about the high cost of cleaning up if there were ever any accidents. If oil tankers will be going through that passage, we're extremely concerned about that. If an accident ever happened it would be very difficult to deal with, so we have to put in measures to make sure that if a disaster happens, somebody will pay for the cleanup.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How welcoming, though, is your community to the prospect of a potential commercialization of that passage, given there would be economic development and perhaps easing of the high cost of living in the far north?

• (1010)

Mr. John Amagoalik: First of all, I don't see how opening up the passage for commercial use could deal with the high cost of living.

The very first concern of Inuit living in that region is to make sure the passage is environmentally protected, because Lancaster Sound is recognized by the international community as a very important ecosystem. UNESCO has been pushing for that sound to be recognized as a heritage site for 20 or 25 years now. Our first priority is to make sure the wildlife and the environment are protected before any agreement is made about a commercial passage.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Whether we like it or not, there is an indication that there is passage of nuclear submarines in that area. Given the priority of ensuring the environment is protected, would your community feel it would be necessary to have a port that was able to handle an accident or an emergency involving a nuclear-powered vehicle?

Mr. John Amagoalik: Regarding the use of nuclear submarines, battleships, we don't want to militarize the Arctic. We don't want the Arctic to become a contest between powerful countries like Russia and the United States.

As I said, we want recognition of the passage as internal waters so that it will be up to Canadians to decide what happens there. The position of the United States as of now is that the Northwest Passage is international waters. That is not acceptable to us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I give the floor to Mr. Paillé.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you.

Let me wait for the translation. Can you hear me? Thank you for being here.

Your testimony thus far has been very interesting. We have been examining the matter of the Northwest Passage for some weeks now. I am particularly moved by your testimony and it has given me much better information about your reality.

I just have one question and then I will share my time with my colleague.

Do you see the Northwest Passage, or all the development that is currently going on in the Arctic, as an opportunity to establish new relationships with the government, to put some things right, perhaps to demand investment? Or do you see it as just another challenge that you have to be afraid of? I would like to know if it is something that concerns you or something that you embrace.

[English]

Mr. John Amagoalik: The kind of relationship we will have with the Government of Canada is described by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. That's number one. As far as opening up the area for economic development, oil and gas, mining, and that sort of thing, if it's going to help our communities then we're willing to negotiate.

As we have indicated, we are the designated organization in this part of Nunavut. If a mining company wants to open up a mine, they talk to us. If an oil company wants to carry out a project for oil and gas in the High Arctic, they come to see us. The first thing that has to happen is that the people have to talk to us. If we're satisfied with the benefits we're going to receive from projects, we're perfectly willing to talk to people.

• (1015)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: May I continue, Mr. Chair? I have two questions.

The first is for Mr. Merritt. Mr. Merritt, Mary Simon, the president of your organization, has provided testimony to this committee. She had six recommendations and I am wondering if your organization, the ITK, might want to add a seventh. As you know, the government's Northern Strategy applies to the Inuvialuit and to Nunavut, but not to Nunavik or Nunatsiavut.

Would your organization be prepared to make a seventh recommendation to the government, to include all Inuit in one territory? From time immemorial, for as long as you have lived on the land, there have been no borders. Yet, today, the white man is putting borders everywhere. Is it not just as important for your friends in Nunavik or Nunatsiavut to be included in the Northern Strategy?

The second question goes to Mr. Eckalook. I am worried about the housing issue. I have often visited the Arctic and I have seen houses with four generations of Inuit living in them, up to 20 people under one roof. I am a little worried about the spread of the H1N1 flu virus. You will be taking the plane home, and one of you, possibly infected with the virus, will find yourself in a house with 20 people. You run the risk of infecting everybody.

Can you tell me if any arrangements have been made to provide vaccination against the H1N1 virus?

Also, do you agree with me that those homes are not designed to house 20 people? Do you not feel that the federal government should provide more help to ensure decent living conditions and to make sure that four generations do not have to live under the same roof?

Perhaps we could start with Mr. Merritt.

[English]

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you for that question.

ITK has said before this committee, and publicly in other places, that it believes the federal government's current northern strategy should be a genuine Arctic strategy that includes all four Inuit regions, including Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador and Nunavik. I think ITK has also made the point that it's very important that an Arctic strategy have a great marine emphasis, as well as reference to land areas within the territories. In addition to all four Inuit regions being included, it's important that the strategy pay proper attention to marine issues. A lot of the difficult issues in relation to sovereignty and environmental protection are marine issues, and it's appropriate to have that focus.

The other point ITK has made is that an Arctic strategy that will be durable should be written in active partnership with Inuit, and not just by federal officials.

On where other Inuit organizations stand on that, Nunavut Tunngavik is a member of ITK, so I believe they endorse that position. QIA is a region within Nunavut, so you're going down the ladder in the structuring of Inuit organizations, but I'm not aware that QIA would have any difficulty with that.

I believe you're going to be hearing further from Makivik Corporation, and I'm sure they will make the same point.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I don't know if you want to add something. You still have 30 minutes ... 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: It is important for us to talk about the H1N1 flu virus.

[English]

The Chair: Do you want to answer that concerning H1N1?

Mr. John Amagoalik: Overcrowded housing, as you have described it, is a condition in some of our communities, and 18 or 20 people are living in three-bedroom houses. Of course that's not acceptable. It creates tension among families. It poses a health hazard to the people living there.

As far as H1N1 is concerned, when it first started last spring it spread very quickly through the territory of Nunavut. This time around it doesn't seem to be as serious, and the Department of Health is looking after vaccinations very satisfactorily. As a matter of fact, I got my vaccination just before I came here. That is going well.

But it is important to remember that overcrowded housing creates health problems in our communities. So when it comes to serious issues like the swine flu, it makes it even more difficult when three or four generations have to live in the same house.

• (1020)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Storseth, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming and giving very compelling witness testimony today. I've done a lot of work with my own first nations communities and sat on the aboriginal affairs committee. I understand the importance of respect in your culture. I'm glad to hear you say that consultation has increased somewhat, or your perception of consultation has increased somewhat over the last several years. It's a very important factor in relationship-building between your community and the government.

I come from a community in northern Alberta where we have a couple of military bases. We see the military not only as tanks, guns, and airplanes, but quite frankly as a mechanism for building infrastructure in our communities. The military seldom comes to a community without adding benefits, whether it's economic development and jobs or infrastructure. For instance, the military just

spent \$135 million in our community helping to upgrade water, sewer, and infrastructure programs.

Do you see a potential benefit when we talk about the military? It's kind of the chicken and the egg. It's not always just about equipment; sometimes it's about increasing resources and infrastructure. Do you agree with that?

Mr. John Amagoalik: Historically the relationship between the military and the Inuit has been almost non-existent. During and after the Second World War, the military had a big presence in the Arctic. It had a big presence in those early days. That also included the American military, in places like Resolute Bay. There was almost no relationship between the military and the Inuit, but they sure did leave a lot of garbage, especially at the DEW line sites. They left a lot of toxic garbage around. It has taken years and years and millions of dollars to clean up those sites. We inherited that from the military presence in the Arctic in the early years.

Today the relationship is much better. The military is recognizing that they need the Inuit to do a proper job of patrolling the Arctic and asserting sovereignty. They're working with the Rangers much more closely, and they're consulting with the organizations when they want to carry out major exercises, like the one on southern Baffin Island this past summer. If they're going to build training centres, they have to have discussions with us. We see this as an opportunity to improve things like infrastructure and to make sure the military is working closely with our people, with the Rangers, and that they're not leaving their garbage like they used to.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Absolutely.

I know in our area the exposure to the north and your culture has really increased, especially with national television, with our Prime Minister bringing his cabinet up there as often as he has. I don't think any Prime Minister has ever been to the north as often as Prime Minister Harper has.

Can you talk a bit about the sense of pride your community has in hosting the Prime Minister and his cabinet? Not only does he go there, but the national media then follows to give more exposure to your beautiful community.

• (1025)

Mr. John Amagoalik: We certainly recognize that the present Prime Minister has gone north more than any other prime minister in the past. We were disappointed with the first two or three times he was up there. He never met with Inuit leaders. He never mentioned the Inuit in his speeches. We were curious as to why that was happening.

Then he came out with this line of "use it or lose it". That to us was very painful. It was a hurtful thing. It was insulting. We do use and occupy the Arctic every day, and we have been doing that for thousands of years. We feel that the Government of Canada has to stop using that line. It doesn't work.

We're happy that the Government of Canada has made the Arctic a priority, and we look forward to working with them. It seems that climate change has put the attention of the whole world on the Arctic. I think that's part of the reason Canadians are much more aware that they have the Arctic. It's going to become very important in the future.

We welcome the priority that the Government of Canada has put on the Arctic, but we want the Government of Canada to recognize that the Inuit are the lynchpin of anything that happens up there.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Absolutely

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for being here this morning. I am sure that all of the members appreciated your presentation. It will be useful for our future work.

[*English*]

Thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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