

Making Modern Treaties Work – LCAC
Plenary 4: For a Better Tomorrow

Chair/Moderator: [Math'ieva Alatini](#), Chief Strategist, GSD Strategies

Jordan Peterson, Deputy Grand Chief/Vice President, Gwich'in Tribal Council

SPEAKER 1: Leena Evic, President, Pirurvik Centre Inc.

Based on speaker's notes provided by speaker

- Two years ago, at the last gathering of the National Land Claims Coalition Conference, as part of my opening comments I talked about coming across an article a few years earlier that was so timely to the events we were discussing. But after checking the date on the article, I saw, in fact that it had been written almost 30 years earlier. That article was about our Inuit leaders who had gathered in Rankin Inlet – five years before the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.
- Inuit leaders urged the Canadian government of the day to recognize Inuktitut as an official language of Canada through a provision in the land claim. As we all know, there is no such article in our living Nunavut Land Claims agreement. Therefore, we are still today on the first verse of the same song. This morning, am I just going to add on more wording to the same verse? This was my question coming here today.
- Qulliq, as you may know, is one of the many traditional, original, authentic innovations of my people, the Inuit of the Arctic. Besides our transportation technology, which was the dogteam, qulliq was our technology to thrive in our environment. Our own expert scientific based technological equipment built with everything from our Arctic world was a demonstration of our self-reliance and self-sufficiency that almost disappeared from our lives as we transitioned from our traditional culture to our relocated communities.
- Having travelled that difficult journey with us, the qulliq has become a powerful symbol of our resilience as a people of the Arctic. Today, as we think about what is happening right now across Canada in terms of the outcry of Indigenous people, I ask myself, “How much more are we going to lose?”
- I have been invited to speak to you today on the topic of sustaining Indigenous languages. The title of this plenary is “For a Better Tomorrow,” which extends to ways to support wellbeing in the modern treaty context.
- Two years ago, I echoed something along the lines of “In our traditional life, Inuit often spent time at a place called Aurniarvik. This was a temporary place – a transitioning camp, where a family or hunters would stay while they waited for the trail to become passable for the upcoming season.
- A stay at Aurniarvik would often involve proper prepping for the trip – for example – fine tuning tools and gear, waiting for the trail to be safe, hunting along the shoreline and, fundamentally, shifting the ease of mind from winter hibernation inside dwellings to life outdoors once again.
- I also said at that same time that I believe that we – as Indigenous cultures – are in our Aurniarvik era: a temporary stop as we search for our permanent place of resilience, freedom, and self-determination. We have begun to delve deep into our inner world of collective voice as we gather our strength and gear for the great change.

- Well, today, I've come to conclude as the vision keeper of the Pirurvik Centre, that this Aurniarvik era I referred to two years ago is now embodied by a tangible, real group of young Inuit who have endured years of hunger to learn their own language and are now full-time students of our Aurniarvik Inuktit language program for Inuit second language learners. Just like the Aurniarvik I described they are only in a temporary phase - prepping their gear to master skills and knowledge required to advance to our Qimattuvik Inuktit First Language program for Inuit.
- Two years ago, I was only able to share with you Pirurvik's aspirations of the potential of full-time Inuktit programming that could only happen with adequate financial commitment from funders. After all, we were running ad hoc short-term language programs for 16 years knowing full well we only continued to scratch the surface of what was possible. Today, I have a new story to share.
- Pirurvik has launched its pathways to excellence in Inuktit that includes three new full-time accredited programs:
 - o the **Qimattuvik Certificate** for Inuit who are first language speakers of Inuktit;
 - o the **Aurniarvik Certificate** for Inuit who are second language learners of Inuktit; and,
 - o **Aqquasiurvik**, which is Pirurvik's diploma program for training the next generation of Inuktit instructors.
- All three programs are underway in partnership with the University of Victoria's Department of Indigenous Language Education and its School of Continuing Studies.
- Each cohort of the certificate programs is taking a series of ten immersion courses, which are not mixed with English language courses as the status quo has continued to provide.
- For the Qimattuvik program, Pirurvik offers the following courses for your background information and context: Nunavut standardized Writing System, Inuktit Grammar course for Inuit, Inuktit Computing and Keyboarding, Inuktit Professional Writing in the Workplace, Modern and Technical Terminology, Variations of Inuktit: Inuktit Dialectology, Inuktit Creative Writing and Articulate Speaking Skills Uqqaritsautit (Inuit Traditional Terminology), Learning From Inuit Life Stories: Voices of our Elders, Inuit Timeline: Past to Present Era, and Inuit Makimaningat: Inuit Wellbeing (RTWW and RTWM).
- Aurniarvik students, who are also enrolled in ten immersion courses in Inuktit second language, will graduate over to the Qimattuvik program - no longer second language learners but as first language speakers.
- A few months ago, we put out an ad for applications to register for the two certificate programs hoping that we would get enough interest. To our amazement, we received applications from all of our Inuit regions in Canada as well as Alaska. It was very telling that we Inuit today run a deep hunger for our own language and cultural stability – yearning for the potential that has been pushed down dormant upon us, our dull identity full of potential – spoke a silent motto stating, “please provide us the means and support to learn Inuktit.”
- Almost a year ago, we received approval from the Makigiaqta Training Corporation to develop and deliver these three core programs I mentioned. What we are now realizing is if sustaining Indigenous language training is to be successful and long term, it has to come with a bigger package.

- Firstly, student financial support to enable learners to pursue their studies full time; Secondly, due to housing costs in Nunavut, subsidized student housing is crucial; Currently, a private institute like Pirurvik has two classrooms to deliver these full-time courses. Running multiple full-time, accredited programs requires a facility that is designed for student success.
- We are grateful to our Inuit land claim organization and the Makigiaqta Inuit Training Corporation for investing in Pirurvik's Inuktitut language legacy program.
- To fully appreciate the impact these programs are already having, let me share with you some testimonials from our students:
- Student 1:
 - o During the Opening Ceremony I sat there, listening to all of you speaking Inuktitut. I sat there in awe even not understanding one single word of what was being said. I thought to myself in amazement, almost to a level of disbelief, 'this is the last opening ceremony of anything that I will attend and not be able to understand anyone'. I actually wanted to get up to the podium and speak to everyone and say -- It was Canada that made sure I grew up knowing English and French, and it will be Pirurvik who will be responsible for bringing me 'home'. I actually had some silent tears sitting there.
 - o And now, only a mere 2 weeks into the 8-month long full-time Inuktitut class, I am gaining so much knowledge in our mother tongue.
 - o My uiga (my husband) is astounded that I am coming home everyday asking questions, speaking to him in Inuktitut and asking questions in Inuktitut. I asked him one day, suqqavit?
- Student 2
 - o Through this program, I am building and using tools to equip myself and others to reclaim and restore our identity as Nunavut Inuit, to help navigate through the acute social, cultural and linguistic erosion we face today.
- Student 3
 - o Pirurvik is so much more than a place to learn Inuktitut, though it undoubtedly is the safest place to do so. We may be individual students of Aurniarvik but we carry what we learn with our peers, our families and our community.
 - o There are no words to express how meaningful it is to have a conversation with a unilingual Inuktitut speaking elder, when just 3 years ago, it was not possible.
 - o Generations once forced apart by colonization are now being reconnected thanks to those at Pirurvik.
- Student 4
 - o Pirurvik Centre is the heart of cultural and linguistic renaissance in Nunavut.
 - o It is our beacon of light as Inuit advance toward self-determination.
- To conclude, I want to leave with you a few of my personal impressions:
 - o Since we started our full-time classes, students attending their program all day, five days a week in an immersion environment is a dream come true for me.
 - o The laughter from both classrooms is contagious and is inspiring because it's an energy of Inuit-ness.
 - o Being immersed with the Aurniarvik cohort, I've realized how much we need to be gentle with each other as Inuit: the lateral violence drains us at some point; we

know it's going to take great strength to flip the status quo and we need each other for that for the sake of tomorrow's children.

- In our traditional Inuit culture, the husband and wife or mother and father worked together because they knew they were in it together for their family; Nunaqqatigiit, meaning the whole society, practiced the same belief that “we're in this together”; At Pirurvik, we're practicing with our students that “we're in this together; My hope is all of us in this room can commit to just that – “we're all in this together;”
 - full-time accredited certificate and diploma programs for our Indigenous languages;
 - adequate student financial support or sponsorship;
 - adequate space and facility to house our full-time Indigenous studies as if they've always been at par with English and French;
 - help us to graduate multitudes of thriving young Inuit today and in decades to come.

SPEAKER 2: Jordan Peterson, Deputy Grand Chief/Vice President, Gwich'in Tribal Council

- Jordan Peterson began his talk by asking the people in the room to close their eyes. He said, “imagine you get in your car and you are on your way to the grocery store. But on the way, you have to stop for stop signs, and traffic lights. Each one of those stop signs is a barrier to getting where you need to be. And only the municipality has the power to remove them. If they were removed, it would be much faster to get the groceries you need.” Then, he asked the room to open their eyes.
- Jordan used this grocery store analogy in relation to modern treaty implementation. He said, when thinking about barriers, remember how challenging it can be for some communities to even just come to meet people. For remote northern communities, it can be a two-day trek to just meet with people in Ottawa. He said he hopes people can understand that for these communities, every one of those stop signs on the way to the grocery store is an ADM or DM of CIRNAC, or even people in their own communities acting as barriers on their journey for self-determination.
- Jordan continued to say that there has been a lot of progress. But he said, “it's often a lifelong career for people trying to implement these agreements. Every one of those barriers, if you think about it in a new way, as a way to build new relationships, and to be more solution oriented, your jobs are going to get easier.”
- Jordan explained how a couple of years ago “the PM and his staff kept saying ‘your agreements, your agreements, your agreements.’ But the task of implementing these agreements, our agreements, they need to understand that they are their (the government's) agreements as well.”
- At the end of the day, Jordan explained, “we are all directed by these mandates. But if we think about them as opportunities for relationships and to better our communities, the discussion changes with these different rules.”
- The Gwich'in Tribal Council has had a Land Claim for 28 years. Extinguishment clauses were part of that agreement, essentially extinguishing many of the rights that were agreed to in Treaty 11. Jordan noted that the Elders hold these extinguished rights in high regard.

- He conceded that “we have not done a good enough job in explaining what those things mean. We are one of the last land claims to have wording like extinguishment. But that doesn’t mean the government won’t throw up roadblocks to other Indigenous governments.”
- Jordan emphasized that the point of his talk is to highlight the need to think of different solutions. These solutions are not to make anyone look bad, he said. The solutions put forward by the LCAC stem from what’s been observed on the ground in trying to implement these Agreements.
- Jordan described the onerousness of implementing the Gwich’in Land Claim. “The Gwich’in have signed a year-to-year implementation plan for the last 8 years. If that’s the reality we live in, how does that show other Nations that land claims are a good thing? If we are held to this regard by Minister Bennett, or other governments, then why isn’t CIRNAC trying, or at least putting to the test, what is put forward by the Coalition?”
- Jordan closed by acknowledging that 28 years down the road from the signing of the Gwich’in Land Claim, not much has changed.
- But all of those roadblocks are things that can be changed.
- He said, “instead of thinking of what policies are currently in place, there is a need to be creative and think of what policies can be collaboratively, creatively put in place to get where we all need to be, that’s the path forward. Instead of the roadblocks, we need to create new fiscal policies to foster implementation of these treaties. Let’s stop thinking in four-year mandates and let’s start thinking of seven generations down the road.”

Questions:

1. Thank you for sharing what you know of our ancestors for a better tomorrow. This morning I heard, it’s not black and white. I’ve heard this said in many ways for a long time. Sometimes it’s said in silence. Our language is not black and white. People say you know either know the language or not, but in reality, all of us know our language. We feel it, we thrive in it. Thank you for expressing what is going on at the community level and I just wanted to applaud you both for your presentations and analogies that our people can connect with.
2. My question is about the relation between the Gwich’in Agreement and Treaty 11. It wasn’t clear, how does the Land Claim work with Treaty 11, in particular with respect to the extinguishment clauses in the Land Claim?

Jordan Peterson

- The Gwich’in tried to remove extinguishment clauses from the Land Claim, which was spurred from a comment made by Minister Bennett. She commented that that no Nation should ask another other Nation to extinguish their rights.
- That comment was enough for me to go forward with the request, as many elders have issue with the extinguishment of Treaty rights.
- But the foundation of our Land Claim is Treaty 11. But the way they define our people is not the way we define our people. Treaty 11 was not signed with status Indians; it was signed by Gwich’in. There is an interplay between the two things - Treaty 11 is the foundation of the Land Claim, and Nation-to-Nation relationship was established when Treaty 11 was signed in 1921.

