

## QTC Media Lines

### **Mandate / Purpose**

- In 2007, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association independently established and financed a truth commission to create an accurate history of decisions and events that affected Inuit living in the Baffin Region between 1950 and 1975, and to document their impacts on Inuit life.
- The Qikiqtani Truth Commission is the first Inuit-sponsored and Inuit-led initiative of its kind.
- It is also a rare example of a comprehensive social justice inquiry led by an Aboriginal organization.
- During its three-year mandate, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission amassed an authoritative collection of historical documentation and interviewed about 350 witnesses during public hearings to uncover the truth about this period, a time of profound economic and cultural change for Inuit living in the Baffin Region.
- This broader truth and reconciliation process seeks to promote healing and forgiveness among those who suffered from historic wrongs, and to repair relations between Inuit and governments.
- In Inuktitut terms, Qikiqtani Inuit are seeking *saimaqtigiiniq*: peace with past opponents.
- Ultimately, the QTC hopes that its findings and recommendations will empower Inuit to create a more promising future.

### **Context**

- No single truth will explain the changes that Qikiqtani Inuit experienced from 1950 to 1975.
- Nor are there easily identified villains and victims.
- Yes, it is a history of displaced families, inadequate housing, coercive government relations, tuberculosis epidemics, residential schools and the killing of qimmit, or sled dogs.
- But it is also a history of increased opportunity, new social programs and mutual—if misguided and inappropriate—efforts to reconcile two very different cultures: those of the North and the South, Inuit and Qallunaat.
- Between 1950 and 1975, government policy was to make the North more like the South, and Inuit more like southern Canadians.
- The changes imposed on Inuit to achieve this goal were rapid and dramatic. As a result:

- Government officials failed to consult Inuit when designing and implementing their plans.
- Projects were frequently mismanaged or underfunded.
- Many Inuit never understood why government decisions were imposed on them, and in such a short period of time.

### ***From Inuit Nunagivaktangit to Year-Round Settlements***

- Before 1950, most Inuit families lived on the land in tightly-knit family groups of five to thirty people.
- They moved between Inuit nunagivaktangit by dog team or boat, following the wildlife that supplied most of their food, clothing and shelter.
- This deep connection to the land sustained a rich culture and language.
- After 1950, the Canadian government created 13 permanent settlements in the Baffin region where officials could educate Inuit children, provide medical treatment, and distribute family allowances, welfare and old age pensions.
- Some Inuit moved to these settlements voluntarily for jobs, health care or housing.
- Others moved to stay with children attending school or join family members who had already moved.
- Still others moved because they felt government authorities had forced them to relocate.
- The decision to give up life on the land was never easy. Once made, it was irreversible.
- Whether or not they moved voluntarily, many found that promises of a “better life” were not kept and their lives were made worse, not better, by the move.
- Settlement life imposed a new form of poverty, and lack of access to the land hindered their ability to obtain the country food that nourished their bodies and souls.
- Inuit often despaired as they, their families and neighbours struggled with circumstances beyond their control.

### ***Settlement Housing***

- Even though housing was the largest government investment at that time, the houses built were too few, too small, and totally unsuited to Arctic conditions.
- Many lived in tents until housing was available.
- Throughout this period, government officials failed to clearly explain Qallunaat concepts of rental contracts and house ownership, which were foreign to Inuit.

### ***Settlement Life***

- Settlement life made Inuit dependent on government and created an imbalance of power between the two.
- All aspects of Inuit daily life and relationships changed in the settlements.
- For example:
  - Some Elders felt useless, and many Inuit men could not reconcile their new circumstances with their desire to provide for their families.
  - Traditional marriage practices and adoptions were challenged by officials.
  - Settlements seemed crowded because many neighbours were also strangers—a new situation for Inuit.
- Inuit who lacked qimmiit or snowmobiles to access the land felt that settlement life was a form of imprisonment.

### ***Substance Abuse***

- Settlement life brought many Inuit into regular contact with alcohol, which, along with gambling and drugs, became an unhealthy distraction.
- By the 1970s, many families were experiencing the devastating consequences of substance abuse, including alcoholism, addiction, physical and sexual abuse, the neglect of children, poverty and death.
- Government officials made very little effort to control the entry of alcohol or drugs, despite easily controlled access points.
- Inuit were given very little support to deal with the negative effects of either drugs or alcohol.

### ***Schooling and its Effects on Inuit Culture***

- In the 1950s, the Canadian government decided all Inuit children needed a formal education to join mainstream Canadian society and fill the new jobs of an expanding northern economy.
- This decision and the methods used to enforce it had profound consequences for Inuit children, families, communities and culture.
- Most Inuit were told they would lose the family allowances they needed to survive if they did not send their children to school.
- While many children lived with their parents and went to school in Baffin settlements, others were sent to faraway residential schools or southern cities.

- Wherever they went to school, Inuit children were taught an English curriculum with no relevance to their lives in the North, their Inuit heritage, or their Inuktitut language.
- Over time, the school system created a deep cultural and generational divide between children and parents that often proved hard to repair.
- Ultimately, cultural teachings, beliefs, values and skills were compromised.

### ***Hunting***

- Hunting has always been a defining element of Inuit culture.
- Inuit apply a deep understanding of their environment to laws, customs and practices to ensure the wise use of the game resources.
- In the 1950s, the Canadian Wildlife Service developed laws that strictly defined the types, numbers and times of year that animals could be hunted—without the benefit of Inuit knowledge or reliable information about Arctic game populations.
- Under such unreasonable prohibitions, Inuit often had to choose between starvation and illegal hunting, hiding their catches from authorities to avoid fines and incarceration.

### ***The Killing of Qimmiit***

- Before 1950, the care and management of a sled dog team was an important part of Inuit culture.
- But settlement life threatened the lives of Inuit sled dogs, or qimmiit.
- Between 1957 and 1975, the number of qimmiit declined dramatically.
- While some died from disease or were abandoned by their owners, hundreds were shot by the RCMP and other settlement authorities because Qallunaat were afraid of loose dogs.
- But dogs belonging to the RCMP, special constables or Hudson Bay employees were not shot: this exemption created animosity between those whose dogs were shot and those whose dogs were spared.
- Hunters and their families suffered terribly when they lost their qimmiit, becoming dependent on welfare and store-bought food.
- The killing of qimmiit has become a flash point in Inuit memories:
  - of the changes imposed on their lives by outsiders; and
  - of the challenges to their independence and self-reliance as hunters.

### ***QTC Analysis of the RCMP and Inuit Sled Dogs (2006) Report***

- In the late 1990s, a number of Inuit publicly accused the RCMP of killing sled dogs under government orders to limit Inuit mobility and any possible return to a traditional way of life.
- In 2005, the federal government rejected a parliamentary committee's call for an independent inquiry into the dog killings, and asked the RCMP to investigate itself instead.
- The resulting *RCMP Sled Dogs Report* confirmed that hundreds and perhaps thousands of dogs were killed by RCMP and other authorities in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The Qikiqtani Truth Commission analysed the *RCMP Sled Dogs Report* and found it lacking in several respects:
  - The RCMP took an overly legalistic approach to their investigation.
  - They looked only for evidence of a government conspiracy or unlawful behaviour.
  - They did not consider whether or not the dog ordinance was appropriate, or how these killings might be related to the relocation of Inuit.
  - They dismissed Inuit memories of the killings as false, and accused Inuit leaders who brought the incidents to public notice of being motivated by a desire for monetary compensation.
- QTC analysis of the RCMP report also reveals that:
  - Inuit had no access to decision-makers.
  - Explanations about why dogs were to be tied up were often incomplete or badly translated.
  - Many Inuit were not even told why their dogs were shot.
  - While the law was clear to those who enforced it, to Inuit hunters it was illogical, unnecessary and harmful, as well as inconsistently and unpredictably applied.
- It was therefore reasonable for Inuit to associate the killing of their sled dogs with the detrimental effects of centralization.
- That said, QTC analysis shows that the killings went on far too long to be the result of a secret plan or conspiracy, and that the dog killings began—in the mid-1950s at Iqaluit—several years before the federal government adopted a formal central policy of dog control.
- Ultimately, the Government of Canada failed in its obligations to Inuit when it restricted their use of dogs without providing the means to make those restrictions less onerous or involving Inuit directly in finding solutions.

### ***Health Care and the Separation or Loss of Family Members***

- After 1950, the accepted medical practice of removing Inuit patients to southern hospitals succeeded in improving their health but inflicted other lasting damage.

- Personnel on the *C.D. Howe* medical patrol ship screened Inuit for TB and other infectious diseases, removing the sick without notice for indefinite stays in southern hospitals.
- Those sent south for treatment endured weeks on board the ship and months or years in treatment, far from their families.
- They experienced a profound sense of culture shock and dislocation, both down south and upon their return.
- Children were essentially orphaned at southern TB facilities and disciplined in ways they would never have experienced at home: spanked, hit, force-fed or tied down to their beds for hours on end.
- Officials also lost or mixed up records, failing to return both children and adults to their own Inuit nunagivaktangat or districts.
- Other children never returned, or returned years later upon discovering they had been kept by well-meaning staff.
- Adults who returned from treatment were often unable to return to their former lives and ended up dependent on government relief.
- Some relatives were never informed that a family member had died down south: many do not know where their relatives are buried and have not been able to visit the graves.

### ***Development and Employment***

- The Canadian government encouraged economic development in the North to bring southern standards of living to the Inuit, but the pace of development was slow.
- Although some Inuit benefited from a wage economy, others were mistreated while working for development enterprises, or never paid for labour and services provided to government.
- Several went south for training, but few could use their skills to earn wages once they returned home.
- Ultimately, there weren't enough jobs to employ all of the Inuit who moved to settlements: most new jobs created were in government services.
- The region became a place of high unemployment, where formerly self-sufficient families had little choice but welfare.

### **Cross-cultural Communications**

- Inuit and Qallunaat communication was hampered by the lack of a common language and profound cultural differences.
- While Inuit learned English at school, work or southern hospitals, Qallunaat had and saw no need to learn Inuktitut.
- Qallunaat also demonstrated a sense of cultural superiority and believed their role was to lead Inuit into the modern world.
- Inuit had little power to make Qallunaat listen and were not inclined to challenge Qallunaat assumptions and opinions.
- Qallunaat often took advantage of Inuit deference to authority by applying pressure tactics, such as warnings and threats, to obtain the results they wanted, even when Inuit clearly disagreed.
- This attitude inhibited meaningful dialogue about the government policies that affected Inuit lives so profoundly.
- This led many Inuit to draw their own conclusions about government intentions, policies and actions, such as a widespread belief that the killing of qimmiit was part of a deliberate policy to keep them in permanent settlements.

### **QTC Recommendations:**

- As the Commission visited the Qikiqtani communities, we heard impassioned statements—not only about traumatic past experiences, but also about the need for healing and reconciliation.
- Many participants recommended reasonable steps that can and should be taken to allow Inuit to move forward into a more promising future of their own making.
- These, along with recommendations put forward by the Commission and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, are outlined in The *Qikiqtani Truth Commission Final Report: Achieving Saimaqtigiiniq*.

### **To Acknowledge and Heal Past Wrongs:**

- The Government of Canada must acknowledge its responsibility for the many government decisions that led to unnecessary hardship and poor social, health and education outcomes for Inuit.
  - Both southern Canadians and younger Inuit need a better understanding of the harmful changes imposed on Inuit between 1950 and 1975.
1. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association should formally present the full Qikiqtani Truth Commission report to the Government of Canada and request a formal acknowledgement of the report's findings.
  2. The Qikiqtani Truth Commission's historical collection (reports, database and testimonies) should be made accessible to all participants and anyone interested in understanding and presenting an accurate picture of the Qikiqtani region's history.
  3. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association and the RCMP should formally recognize the contributions of Inuit Special Constables and their families to the work of the RCMP in the region.
  4. The Government of Canada should set up a Dundas Harbour Relocation Trust Fund to allow descendants of families separated as a result of this relocation to travel between Cape Dorset and Arctic Bay for periodic family visits.
  5. The Government of Canada should provide funding for on-site healing programs for the families affected by the closing of Kivitoo, Padloping and South Camp (Belcher Islands) communities.
  6. The Government of Canada should defray the costs of allowing Inuit to locate and visit the burial sites of family members who died in southern Canada during medical treatment, in order to provide closure for those families.

### **To Strengthen Inuit Governance:**

- So that prevent past mistakes are not repeated, and political, social and economic decisions truly reflect Inuit culture and needs.

1. The Nunavut Legislative Assembly should formally assert that Nunavut and the Government of Nunavut were created by the Nunavut land claims negotiations as vehicles for Inuit self-government, and, therefore, that Inuit goals and aspirations can and should be advanced through the Government of Nunavut working collaboratively with Inuit organizations.
2. The Government of Nunavut should conduct its day-to-day operations in keeping with its obligations and responsibilities under the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* and section 35 of the Constitution.
3. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association should establish a program that will enable Inuit to develop and utilize the governance skills they will require to strengthen their political and community engagement in a civil society.
4. The governments of Nunavut and Canada should take all necessary action to make their programs and services for the people of Nunavut accessible at the local level.
5. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association should develop a framework (principles, policies and techniques) for all private, public and research agencies to use in conducting consultations with Inuit.
6. To ensure that Inuit culture is better understood by government employees whose work affects the Inuit, the Governments of Nunavut and Canada, assisted by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, should develop and deliver cultural training to all such employees.
7. The governments of Nunavut and Canada, and all Inuit organizations, should respect and incorporate Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit Traditional Knowledge in all decision-making in Nunavut.
8. The Government of Canada should immediately endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples without qualifications.

**To Strengthen Inuit Culture:**

- As one of the founding peoples of Canada who have retained their distinct culture despite the many changes to their way of life since World War Two, Inuit culture needs to be celebrated, strengthened and made better known to other Canadians.
1. The Government of Nunavut Department of Education should develop and distribute an Inuktitut and Inuit-based curriculum to all communities and direct school officials to implement it as soon as possible.
  2. The Government of Nunavut's Department of Education should include historical material from the Qikiqtani Truth Commission reports in the Nunavut education curriculum.
  3. The Government of Nunavut should develop and deliver more programs that

actively promote intergenerational experiences between Elders and Inuit children and youth to ensure that young people continue to learn from Elders, and that Elders become more involved in the daily lives of communities.

4. The Governments of Canada and Nunavut should work together to develop and fund Inuit Language programs that will ensure that all Inuit and Qallunaat in Nunavut have the opportunity to learn the Inuit Language.
5. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association should initiate an Inuit History Month, launching the event in Nunavut and later extending it to all of Canada.

***To Create Healthy Communities:***

- Together, we must take several culturally-appropriate steps to improve the quality of Inuit life and overcome a number of serious social ills, such as alcohol and substance abuse, unhealthy diets, high unemployment, low rates of graduation, high crime rates, and insufficient and substandard housing.
  1. The Government of Canada should formally acknowledge that the levels of suicide, addiction, incarceration and social dysfunction found in the Qikiqtani region are in part symptoms of intergenerational trauma caused by historical wrongs.
  2. The governments of Canada and Nunavut should ensure that sufficient Inuit social, mental health and addiction workers and programs are available to meet the needs of all Nunavut communities.
  3. The governments of Canada and Nunavut should ensure that government health, social and education programs and services are available to the people of Nunavut on a basis equivalent to those taken for granted by Canadians in the South.
  4. The Governments of Canada and Nunavut should address Inuit housing needs through provision of short-, medium- and long-term funding to ensure adequate and safe homes for all.
  5. The Government of Nunavut and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association should work together to facilitate and promote Inuit participation in hunting, fishing and gathering practices that will sustain and strengthen Inuit culture and food security, improve nutrition and support local economies.
  6. The governments of Canada and Nunavut should provide training and other support that will allow Inuit to actively participate in Arctic environmental studies and activities.