

BRIEF TO THE SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE OF
THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF COMMONS ON
SENATE REFORM

Presented by

INUIT COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
ISSUES

October 25, 1983.
Ottawa.

WE WISH TO THANK THE JOINT COMMITTEE FOR ITS KIND
INVITATION TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY AND MAKE OUR
VIEWS KNOWN.

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO ADDRESS A FUNDAMENTAL INEQUITY
FACED BY INUIT IN CANADA: THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL
REPRESENTATION. AS A PEOPLE OCCUPYING APPROXIMATELY
ONE THIRD OF THE LAND AREA OF THIS COUNTRY, AND A
POPULATION MAJORITY THROUGHOUT THAT AREA, WE HAVE
INSUFFICIENT POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT
AND INADEQUATE CONTROL OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES
THAT DAILY AFFECT OUR LIVES. IT IS THIS FACT WHICH
ACCOUNTS FOR MANY OF THE DIFFICULTIES WE HAVE FACED
AS A PEOPLE AND WHICH HAS DRIVEN US TO SEEK AMENDMENTS
TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA AS A MEANS OF BUILDING
INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, CONSIDERATION OF OUR INTERESTS
AND NEEDS.

THE INUIT COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL ISSUES (ICNI) REPRESENTS ALL CANADIAN INUIT IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS. THE SIX REGIONS WHERE WE LIVE - LABRADOR, QUEBEC, BAFFIN, KEEWATIN, KITIKMEOT OR CENTRAL ARCTIC, AND THE WESTERN ARCTIC AREA - ARE EACH REPRESENTED BY A REGIONAL ORGANIZATION WHICH IS IN TURN REPRESENTED IN ICNI. OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS WE HAVE WORKED, TOGETHER WITH OTHER ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, WITH FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARIANS OF ALL PARTIES TO BRING ABOUT REFORM OF THE CONSTITUTION, AND MORE RECENTLY HAVE ALSO BEGUN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT MUCH CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CANADIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM BY COOPERATION, INTELLIGENT CRITICISM, AND WORKING WITH ELECTED POLITICIANS. THAT IS WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY.

AS YOU ARE AWARE, ABORIGINAL PEOPLES ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED

IN DISCUSSIONS WITH ALL GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA, CONCERNING OUR RIGHTS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE CONSTITUTION. WE VIEW OUR RELATIONS WITH BOTH FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS AS FULL, EQUAL AND ONGOING PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE WITHIN THIS COUNTRY.

IN DISCUSSING THE REFORM OF THE SENATE, THERE ARE CERTAIN PRINCIPLES WE THINK YOU SHOULD CONSIDER. THESE PRINCIPLES ARE AS VITAL TO US AS ANY WISDOM THAT MAY BE GAINED FROM EXAMINATION OF OVERSEAS PRECEDENTS. THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF EVERY COUNTRY IS VARIED DEPENDING ON THE INTERPLAY OF PEOPLES, VALUES, TRADITIONS AND HISTORY PERTAINING TO THAT REGION OF THE GLOBE. WITHIN THE CONTEXT THAT IS DISTINCTLY OURS AS CANADIANS, WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES.

OUR FIRST PRINCIPLE, OF COURSE, IS THAT OF OUR RIGHT TO

SELF-GOVERNMENT. INUIT, AS AN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, HAVE
THE RIGHT TO DECIDE ON THE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT THAT BEST
DEAL WITH THE COMPLEX AND DIVERSE ISSUES THAT FACE OUR
CIRCUMPOLAR SOCIETIES. REPRESENTATION OF THE ABORIGINAL
PEOPLES IN THE CENTRAL INSTITUTIONS OF CANADA IS AN
EXTENSION TO OUR RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION WITHIN THE
FEDERATION.

IT IS ON THIS BASIS THAT WE SEEK GREATER REPRESENTATION OF
INUIT IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. FOR OUR PEOPLE TO BE
ABLE TO SPEAK IN THE CENTRAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE CANADIAN
FEDERATION, TO CONVEY THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED
LONGEST IN THIS LAND, IS SURELY A MATTER OF BASIC RESPECT.

IT WOULD BE A JUST WAY FOR CANADIANS TO ACKNOWLEDGE A
SITUATION THAT FOR TOO MANY YEARS HAS BEEN SADLY LACKING
IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND THE
SETTLER POPULATION. SUCH A RECOGNITION IS ^{ESSENTIAL} TO THE CONSTITUTION

AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF A COUNTRY IN THIS CONTINENT. REPRESENTATION IS SORELY NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR INTERESTS AND AFFECT THE POLICIES IN THIS COUNTRY THAT CONCERN OUR PEOPLE. AS ONE OF CANADA'S ORIGINAL PEOPLES, WE SEEK TO BRING TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OUR HISTORY, OUR VALUES, OUR STRENGTH AND DETERMINATION. WE BELIEVE THAT IN RETURN WE ARE OWED BASIC RECOGNITION IN THE POLITICAL CENTRES OF DECISION-MAKING IN CANADA.

ALLIED WITH THIS PRINCIPLE IS A SECOND, THAT OUR PARTICIPATION
IN FEDERAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS BE SIGNIFICANT. BY THIS WE MEAN THAT WE ARE NOT INTERESTED ONLY IN A SEAT IN A HONORIFIC BODY; WE WANT EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THIS COUNTRY. SINCE THE CREATION OF THE NUNATSIAQ SEAT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, INUIT HAVE BEEN MORE ABLE TO REACH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. OUR MP, PETER ITTINUAR, HAS

CONSISTENTLY WORKED TO BRING UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAYS OF GOVERNMENT AND ITS BENEFITS TO OUR PEOPLE WHILE HELPING US MAKE KNOWN IN PARLIAMENT OUR CONCERNS AND THE PROBLEMS OF OUR PART OF THE WORLD. FOR OUR PEOPLE, THIS HAS BEEN A GREAT BENEFIT; FOR YOU LEGISLATORS AND SOUTHERN CANADIANS GENERALLY, IT HAS BEEN A WAY TO ENSURE THAT THE NORTHERN PEOPLES FELT A PART OF CANADA AND PLANNED THEIR DESTINY WITHIN IT. IN SHORT, INUIT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION HAS HAD, AND WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE, A USEFUL FUNCTION OF TWO-WAY POLITICAL ACCOMODATION. WHAT IS IMPORTANT AT THIS TIME, IS THAT INUIT REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT - OR IN QUEBEC, NEWFOUNDLAND AND THE N.W.T. - BE IN POSITIONS WHERE THE VITAL DECISIONS ARE MADE SO THAT THEY CAN PROPERLY PERFORM THEIR ROLE AS LEGISLATOR AND AS REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR PEOPLE.

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION IS INADEQUATE FOR US: WE WANT

EFFECTIVE, MEANINGFUL AND WORKABLE REPRESENTATION.

ACCORDINGLY, WE PROPOSE THAT THERE BE MORE SEATS FOR INUIT
IN BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. AT THE PRESENT TIME, THERE
ARE NO INUIT SENATORS OR MP'S FROM EITHER NORTHERN QUEBEC
OR LABRADOR; NO REFORM OF THE SENATE CAN PROPERLY ADDRESS
OUR CONCERNS WITHOUT IMMEDIATELY REDRESSING THIS GLARING
UNDERREPRESENTATION. WE NOTE THAT YOUR TERMS OF REFERENCE
INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF THE WAYS BY WHICH THE AUTHORITY
OF PARLIAMENT MAY BE ENHANCED " TO SPEAK AND ACT ON BEHALF
OF CANADIANS IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY". WE BELIEVE THAT
EFFECTIVE AND INCREASED ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION IN THE
AFFAIRS OF PARLIAMENT WOULD GO FAR IN ENHANCING PARLIAMENT'S
AUTHORITY AS IT WOULD IN FURTHERING THE CONTRIBUTION OF
CANADA'S ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TO THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN THIS
COUNTRY.

BEFORE DISCUSSING WAYS BY WHICH THE SENATE IN PARTICULAR MAY BE REFORMED, WE THINK THAT YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND BETTER OUR CIRCUMSTANCES AND WHY WE ARE SEEKING PARLIAMENTARY, AND SPECIFICALLY SENATE, REPRESENTATION AT THIS TIME. UNLIKE IMMIGRANT MINORITIES WHICH CAME TO A NEW LAND, DRAWN BY THE PROMISE OF OPPORTUNITY OR FREEDOM, WE DID NOT MOVE INTO A PRE-DEFINED SOCIETY IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WE WOULD HAVE TO LEARN NEW LANGUAGES AND ADJUST TO NEW WAYS. RATHER WE WERE HERE IN FULL POSSESSION OF OUR LAND, MAKING DECISIONS ACCORDING TO OUR OWN WAYS OF DOING THINGS. A NEW AND IMPROVED LEGAL SYSTEM SIMPLY IGNORED ALL THAT AND WE FOUND OURSELVES WITHOUT RECOGNIZED RIGHTS. OUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS TO MAKE LIVING OUR^USING THE RESOURCES AND LANDS WE HAD ALWAYS USED WERE DENIED OR IGNORED. BY VIRTUE OF OUR LOCATION REMOTE FROM YOUR POPULATION CENTRES, AND SOMETIMES, AS WITH THE INDIAN PEOPLES, BY VIRTUE OF THE LAW, WE WERE OUTSIDE THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. WE DIDN'T VOTE AND HADN'T THE OPPORTUNITY, LEGAL OR

OTHERWISE, TO DO SO. EVEN TODAY OUR POPULATION IS FRAGMENTED AND DIVIDED AMONG PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL ELECTORAL DISTRICTS SO THAT SOME CANDIDATES OR INCUMBENTS DON'T EVEN FIND IT WORTH THE TIME TO TRAVEL TO THE NORTH TO CAMPAIGN AND SPEAK TO US.

THIS SITUATION IS UNACCEPTABLE: WE BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE FULLY AND EQUALLY IN CANADIAN POLITICAL LIFE AND IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THROUGH LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENTS, CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS-- IN THE N.W.T., NORTHERN QUEBEC AND LABRADOR -- WE WANT TO GAIN POWERS AND OPPORTUNITIES AT THE LOCAL OR REGIONAL LEVEL TO GIVE US EQUALITY WITH OTHER CANADIANS. WHAT WE NEED NOW ARE SIMILAR POWERS AND OPPORTUNITIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

WE SAID EARLIER THAT WE SEE OUR PROBLEM NOT SIMPLY AS ONE

OF SENATE REPRESENTATION, BUT OF PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION. MANY IDEAS FOR HOUSE AND SENATE REFORM HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED IN RECENT YEARS, AND IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT PUBLIC SENTIMENT FAVORS CHANGE. WE BELIEVE THAT, GIVEN THE UNCERTAINTY OF IMMEDIATE REFORM AT THE PRESENT TIME, THAT WE OUGHT NOT TO MAKE DEFINITE PROPOSALS NOW. PARTLY THIS STEMS FROM THE RECOGNITION THAT REFORM OF THE SENATE INVOLVES MANY COMPLEX, INTERLOCKING FACTORS. FOR INSTANCE, IF THE SENATE WERE TO BECOME AN ELECTED BODY BUT WITH REDUCED POWERS, WHILE THE HOUSE RETAIN ITS AUTHORITY, WE WOULD, MOST LIKELY, NOT BE SEEKING SENATE SEATS, AND WOULD MAINLY DEVOTE OUR ATTENTION TO THE HOUSE. AS WE HAVE STATED EARLIER, OUR OBJECTIVE WILL ALWAYS BE TO ENSURE THAT INUIT HAVE THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY AND SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE AFFAIRS OF CANADA.

WHAT KIND OF BODY THEN, DO WE THINK THE SENATE SHOULD BE?

IT SHOULD, WE BELIEVE, BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DIVERSITY OF CANADA AND A FORCE FOR NATIONAL CONSENSUS. FOR THAT REASON WE THINK THAT ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLES SHOULD BE BETTER REPRESENTED.

THIS IS IN KEEPING WITH CANADA'S CONSTITUTIONAL TRADITIONS.

AT CONFEDERATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY, REGIONS, CULTURES, AND

EVEN RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS OBTAINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

POLITICAL RECOGNITION AND PARTICULAR TREATMENT, REGARDLESS

OF SIZE. THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

REAFFIRMS THIS COUNTRY'S COMMITMENT TO MULTI-CULTURALISM.

THIS IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: OUR CONSTITUTIONAL TRADITIONS

ARE TO SUPPORT AND BALANCE DIVERSE INTERESTS, IN ALL REGIONS

OF CANADA.

WE HAVE SOME INTEREST IN AN ELECTED SENATE; THERE ARE,

OF COURSE, MANY ADVANTAGES AS WELL AS DRAWBACKS IN SUCH A MODEL. WHETHER AN ELECTED BODY IS PREFERABLE FOR OUR PEOPLE THAN AN APPOINTED, ALBEIT REFORMED, SENATE, IS SOMETHING WE WISH TO CONSIDER FURTHER. SELECTION OF ONE OR THE OTHER MODEL CLEARLY INVOLVES WEIGHING OF A GREAT MANY COMPLICATED ISSUES. FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, THERE ARE SPECIFIC AND UNIQUE QUESTIONS THAT REQUIRE FURTHER DISCUSSION AND STUDY.

FOR THIS REASON, WE PROPOSE THAT THE QUESTION OF ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT BE SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED. THIS HAS, AS YOU KNOW, BEEN RAISED AS AN AGENDA ITEM IN THE ONGOING CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS, TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE FORUM OF THE FIRST MINISTERS CONFERENCES. IN THAT OR IN ANY OTHER FORA (SUCH AS A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE AS THE PRESENT ONE), ABORIGINAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION MUST BE FULLY AND

EXHAUSTIVELY STUDIED, WITH OF COURSE THE DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES. IN THIS WAY, WE WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO CONSIDER THE ISSUES AND PRESENT OUR VIEWS, AND CONDUCT THE NECESSARY POLITICAL CONSULTATION WITH OUR PEOPLE AND OUR COMMUNITIES.

AT THAT STAGE, WE BELIEVE THAT CAREFUL STUDY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE MECHANICS BY WHICH INUIT AND OTHER ABORIGINAL PEOPLES COULD INFLUENCE MATTERS BEFORE PARLIAMENT, WHICH DIRECTLY AFFECT OUR LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND ECONOMY. THERE ARE MANY TECHNIQUES THAT MIGHT THEN BE CONSIDERED: NOTEWORTHY IN THIS FIELD IS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS PROPOSAL IN ITS DISCUSSION PAPER FOR A SPECIAL MAJORITY VOTE IN CASES OF MEASURES CONTAINING SPECIAL LINGUISTIC SIGNIFICANCE. BUT WE ARE WARY AT THIS STAGE OF OUR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT THAT ANY DETAILED RECOMMENDATION ON SUCH A PROCEDURE OR MECHANISM,

ADAPTED FOR OUR PURPOSES, NOT DETRACT FROM THE OBJECTIVES OF OUR PEOPLE NOW ENGAGED IN LAND CLAIMS NEGOTIATIONS, THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW JURISDICTIONS IN THE NORTH AND THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS. CLEARLY PARLIAMENTARY REFORM SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE GUARANTEES AND STRUCTURES WHICH WE SEEK IN THOSE CONTEXTS. IT IS THEREFORE PREFERABLE TO TAKE MORE TIME IN DEVELOPING OUR VIEWS IN FURTHER TALKS WITH ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATIONS, PARLIAMENTARIANS AND GOVERNMENTS. INUIT STAND READY TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH TALKS AND TO COME UP WITH SPECIFIC PROPOSALS, BUT THIS, AS WE HAVE SAID, WOULD CERTAINLY REQUIRE SOME TIME. THE ALTERATION OF FUNDAMENTAL LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IS NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.

WE TRUST THAT YOUR DELIBERATIONS WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE MAIN POINT OF OUR PRESENTATION -- THAT ANY PARLIAMENTARY

REFORM SHOULD SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN BOTH HOUSES. FOR US, THAT IS THE CRUCIAL AND MOST IMPORTANT DEMAND WE HAVE TO MAKE TO YOU TODAY.

WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY FUTURE PROCESS DESIGNED TO WORK OUT A SPECIFIC MEANS TO ACHIEVING THIS GOAL, ONE RELATED TO OUR FUNDAMENTAL GOAL OF ACHIEVING SELF-GOVERNMENT WITHIN CANADA.

THANK YOU.