



HONOURABLE PAUL OKALIK

PREMIER OF NUNAVUT

Speech for the
Devolution Negotiation Protocol Signing

Ottawa
September 5, 2008

Good morning. Ulluukut. Bonjour.

Thank you, Mister Borbey,
for your kind introduction.

I am very pleased to be here today
with Minister Strahl and President Kaludjak.

Today's signing of the devolution negotiation protocol
is a significant occasion.

Devolution, as you know, is a critical component
for a sustainable and prosperous Nunavut.

There is no doubt that our success
is also tied to the capacity of Nunavummiut
and to a diversified, viable economy.

These three components –
control over our resources,
a skilled workforce
and a growing, sustainable economy –
will ultimately lead to greater self-sufficiency for Nunavut.
This is an equation that we must refine together.

We are making inroads with our workforce
and education system.

More and more Nunavummiut
are graduating from high school
and we are seeing record numbers
going on to college and university.

Increasingly, our citizens are seizing opportunities
in this growing economy -- we are seeing more businesses
starting up than ever before.

And the Nunavut economy is exploding –
up thirteen per cent in 2007.

This is mostly attributed to an expanding
resource development sector

and its potential is widely known.

We have ten per cent of Canada's oil reserves
and more than twenty per cent
of the nation's natural gas reserves.

However, it is important to note that
the equation will only be complete
when decision-making authority
is in the hands of Nunavummiut.

And once those closest to the land and water
become the principal beneficiaries of our resources.

Last week, I echoed this message
to Prime Minister Harper while in Inuvik.
I took the opportunity to explain to him
that Aboriginal issues are too massive to manage
and that our resource matters
should not be buried within them.

These resource-related matters should be our issues
like the rest of the country
and our respective governments should focus
on improving programs and services.

Prime Minister Harper's visit to Canada's North
along with the military exercise, Operation Nanook,
has meant the gaze of media is once again directed north.

And with all this talk of sovereignty,
it is opportune to speak about it in the context of devolution.

I believe that the greatest commitment
this country will make to sovereignty
is the equal treatment of Inuit
in the management and control of our natural resources.
It goes to the core of the Arctic sovereignty debate
by demonstrating commitment to sustainable
and vibrant northern communities.

The transfer of full control
over our resources will mark another step
in the fulfillment of the promise of the Arctic.

This protocol advances our collective interests
and, from here, we must turn our attention to the next task –
the negotiation of a fair agreement.

Today, this signing is a positive
and powerful signal.

And I am happy to be part of this momentous occasion
as we move one step closer
in our great journey towards a prosperous future.

Thank you. Qujannamiik. Merci.

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