

NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

Inuit are maintaining Inuktitut despite Mulroney Cabinet secret instructions to block its use

(December 5, 2019) NTI today released a damning 1990 Government of Canada cabinet document (secret for 20 years; obtained under Access to Information Act) which shows Prime Minister Mulroney and his cabinet knowingly and deliberately blocked use of Inuktitut in government services in the territory--singling out education and courts as two services for which government explicitly decided shall not have any Inuktitut language guarantees or protections.

Statscan reports Inuktitut use among Nunavut Inuit is in decline; however, the Inuit language remains alive despite government attempts to suppress it.

"I am concerned for the safety and wellness of Inuit today, in their daily struggle to access essential government services," says Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) President Aluki Kotierk. "This is in our own homeland – "Nunavut", where we form a significant majority of our jurisdiction's population. Within Nunavut, Inuit expect to be able to receive essential services in Inuktitut."

The document, dated March 13 and March 20, 1990, and stamped 'Secret', outlines Cabinet's instructions to the federal lawyer negotiating the modern treaty with Inuit, which would go on to become the Nunavut Agreement, the largest land claim in the world.

Paragraph 18 of the instructions (page 31) is titled '*Political Development/Language*':

"18. The Final Agreement shall not contain any guarantee for the creation of a Nunavut Territory or provide general linguistic guarantees for use of Inuktitut in government and the legal and educational system in the claims area."

Days later, by April 30, 1990, with the signing of the Agreement In Principle with the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN) in Igloolik, Cabinet would reverse its position on a portion of the negotiation mandate, with an agreement to create the Nunavut Territory via Article 4 of the Nunavut Agreement. Cabinet, however, did not budge on its systemic refusal to respect and support Inuktitut. As a result, Inuit continue to suffer from lack of adequate accessible government services in their own homeland.

By blocking linguistic protection in the land claim, the Government of Canada and its negotiating team blocked Inuit from Constitutional legal recognition of Inuktitut language rights. The Supreme Court of Canada's most far-reaching decision on French language schooling--Mahe--which enforces French schooling 'where numbers warrant', was released March 15, 1990, right in between Cabinet's two deliberations on Nunavut. This illustrates the premeditated nature of Canada's intent to withhold Inuit language rights--which Inuit were only seeking within the Nunavut boundary, where Inuit children are 90% of the school population.

Currently all of Nunavut's schools, except one French school, operate K-12 in English with 25% offering some Inuktitut in the first 3 grades. Canada's objective was successful: schooling, courts, corrections and policing all operate in English across Nunavut. Nunavut's 75% mother tongue Inuktitut population is the only jurisdiction where the tax-paying majority of citizens, speaking a homogeneous language are schooled, hospitalized and policed in a minority language (English).

York University Professor, Ian Martin, who is coordinating the upcoming *National Colloquium on Canada's Indigenous Languages Policy in the wake of Bill C-91*, comments, "This cabinet document further entrenches Inuit assertions that Canada must immediately provide constitutionally-protected language rights, as well as equitable funding to compensate for the secret denial of rights to the Inuit of Nunavut."

"As 2019, the International Year of Indigenous Languages, comes to an end, I urge the federal government to do the right thing and uphold and support Inuktit language rights so that Inuktit may continue to thrive," stated President Kotierk.

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For more information, please contact:

Malaya Mikijuk
Assistant Director of Communications
Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
Tel: (867) 975-4900 Toll-free: 1-888-646-0006
mmikijuk@tunngavik.com
www.tunngavik.com

Qajaaq Ellsworth
Senior Communications Advisor
Office of President Aluki Kotierk
Tel: (867)-975-4900
gellsworth@tunngavik.com
www.president.tunngavik.com

Related links:

- *Report of Committee Decision – Cabinet Committee on Human Resources, Income Support and Health:* <https://president.tunngavik.com/files/2019/12/RCD-03-20-90-TFN-CC-HR-income-support-and-health.pdf>
- *Is Nunavut Education Criminally Inadequate? An analysis of current policies for Inuktit and English in education, international and national law, linguistic and cultural genocide and crimes against humanity:* <https://www.tunngavik.com/news/is-nunavut-education-criminally-inadequate/>
- *C-91, An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages:* <https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/BillDetails.aspx?billId=10293463&Language=E>
- Selected media coverage of Inuit concerns re: C-91:
 - <https://www.tunngavik.com/2019/04/04/president-aluki-kotierk-addressing-bill-c-91/>
 - <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-languages-bill-c91-nunavut-1.5191796>
 - <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-proposed-indigenous-language-law-met-by-mixed-views/>
 - <https://nunavutnews.com/nunavut-news/inuktit-absent-from-proposed-federal-languages-legislation/>
- National Colloquium on Canada's Indigenous Languages Policy in the wake of Bill C-91: <https://www.glendon.yorku.ca/crlcc/national-colloquium/>
- *Nunavut Tunngavik calls for equitable funding for Inuit languages:* <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/equitable-funding-for-inuit-languages-1.4148129>