



Statement of Apology Regarding the Findings of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission

In order to move forward as a country and as individuals, to understand where Canada is and where we are headed, it is important to acknowledge our history and where we came from.

Often, this means facing the difficult parts of our history, and acknowledging the hard truths of our past.

The Inuit-Crown relationship, for far too long, was filled with unfairness, inequality, and harmful treatment.

Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am here in the spirit of "saimaqatigiingniq," a concept which means "when past opponents get back together, meet in the middle, and are at peace with one another." I come with truth and reconciliation at front of mind, with hope of a renewed relationship with Qikiqtani Inuit.

Canada is unearthing the painful truths of our history and is exposing the suffering experienced by harmful policies and practices that deeply impacted Qikiqtani Inuit. This path of reflection brings an opportunity to address the impacts of past actions and build towards a renewed relationship.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Trudeau acknowledged the multiple policies that dramatically impacted the lives of Inuit in the decades following the 1940s. Canadians are only just beginning to understand the history of healthcare, education, and housing policies and programs imposed on Inuit, and how those misguided and underfunded initiatives have lasting impacts that are seen today.

We recognize the work done by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to establish the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, which reviewed the history of the relationship between Qikiqtani Inuit and the Government of Canada. The Commission was mandated to look in particular at community relocations and the killing of qimmiit in the region, but its mandate grew, reflecting how those issues were deeply embedded in a broader colonial history marked by massive and traumatic

disruption to Inuit life and culture between 1950 and 1975, much of it as a result of the Government of Canada's actions.

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission's Final Report tells of many families who are haunted by painful stories of the loss of qimmiit; coming into settlements for supplies and to trade, only to find all of their qimmiit killed. Being suddenly unable to return to families and camps away from townsites, losing the ability to travel and hunt for food safely and effectively. Becoming unable to feed your families. Inuit tell stories of qallunaat laws being inconsistently applied, of not having newly imposed laws explained, the imposition of foreign values that did not take into account the relationship between Inuit and qimmiit. All of these stories are not from an ancient past; they are first hand personal accounts from Inuit, many of whom are still alive, they and their families are still feeling the effects today. The loss of qimmiit had profound effects that have further exacerbated many other aspects of a quickly changing Inuit society.

Elders speak of childhood memories. Painful memories. They speak of how they lived in both traditional camps and communities. Many spoke of this transitional period and the impacts it had on them. Particularly moving, is the late Emily Takatak's story where she described her relocation experience. Emily told the Commission of not being informed about the reason or duration of her relocation. She also talked about not being able to take any belongings with her which left her children feeling cold and her feeling unable to properly care for them. Finally, Emily described she learned that the home she left behind and all of her belongings had been burned by officials.

We hope to move forward from this unjust chapter in our history and together, begin turning the page. The Commission's Final Report, with its recommendations, provides a path forward towards a harmonious future, as well as looking back and reflecting on the road we have travelled.

As we put honest efforts towards turning the page of our painful history, joining together to overcome past unjust practices and assumptions, we want to start by honouring one of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission's most important recommendations: the Government of Canada starts by saying, simply: we acknowledge this history and we are sincerely sorry.

We intend not to offer mere words, but long-term efforts towards correcting our past. I echo the sentiments of previous apologies today in acknowledging the role of the Canadian government in processes that dislocated Inuit families from their homes, families, and culture, too often with deadly or tragic results.

As the Qikiqtani Truth Commission outlined in its Final Report, the changes to Inuit life from 1950 to 1975 were rapid and dramatic. The Report documented how the Canadian government was the primary agent of destructive social changes, often enacted with no consultation with Inuit, and following plans that were frequently misguided or underfunded.

I am moved by the stories in your testimonies and what you have endured as a result of misguided policies; the breakdown of the relationship between Inuit and qimmiit, the past tuberculosis epidemic, the relocations, the lack of adequate housing, and residential schools. These were lived experiences. Through the hurt of living through these past policies, I also heard the voices of the strength of Inuit; the importance of culture, ties to the land, and the bonds within families and community members.

John Amagoalik once stated "In order for forgiveness to be given there must be truth and an acknowledgement of what happened."

Today, the Government of Canada acknowledges that these policies – when taken together – deprived Inuit of self-reliance, and a close relationship with the land. These actions deprived Inuit and the Crown of a respectful and

trusting relationship, qualities which are fundamental to the health of our society.

Without any consultation, and often without any clear explanation, the Government of Canada promised Qikiqtani Inuit a "better life" by beginning to administer southern solutions on the northern way of life. However, in reality, we forced the removal of your children, robbed you of independence, and did not treat you with the dignity you have always deserved. Particularly regrettable is the Government of Canada's participation in the processes that resulted in the loss of qimmiit, which were key to your culture, survival, and community health for time immemorial. We could have taken more time to understand you and to work with you to develop programs that would have been healthy and supportive; as a result, you have suffered greatly and we are deeply sorry.

We failed to provide you with proper housing, adequate medical care, education, economic viability and jobs. We took away your independence by imposing our own priorities and forcing you to survive in a difficult environment and in locations that were not of your choosing, nor your traditional home.

We will put action to our apologies. Our hope is to partner with you, and that by acknowledging past wrongs we can strengthen Inuit culture and governance and create healthier communities. We will work with you to turn the page on the intergenerational trauma your communities faced as a result of past federal policies. Through a saimaqatigiingniq approach of meeting in the middle, we can help families reconnect with your history, address the long term effects of past policies enacted upon Inuit in this region, and provide tools and support for Qikiqtani Inuit to build self-determining and healthy communities.

During this time period, Canada made unilateral decisions about Inuit lives, assuming that the government knew what was best for Inuit. We have and will learn from these great errors. We

are committed to ensuring our future is different from our past.

We recognize and pay tribute to Inuit resilience. It is my hope that we will rebuild trust and embark upon sincere efforts towards achieving "saimaqatigiingniq."

We will reconcile past wrongs by celebrating your communities, honouring your culture, respecting your language, and recognizing the ongoing contribution of Inuit to Canada. We are committed to working with Inuit, to support your leadership in strengthening your culture and creating healthy communities for the generations to come. That's why, here today, the Government of Canada and the QIA are establishing a formal partnership, through a Memorandum of Understanding, to work together on building a long-term and sustainable approach to achieving saimaqatigiingniq following the Qikiqtani Truth Commission's findings. The Government of Canada and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association share a vision of saimaqatigiingniq, a brighter future and a renewed relationship. Through our ongoing partnership, we will continue to work towards the development of sustained programming to Qikiqtani Inuit to promote Inuit culture, healing and well-being for current and future generations.

Today's apology is a promise. To the Inuit of the Qikiqtani region, it's a promise that your history will never be forgotten, and your voices will never go unheard again. A promise, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to continue to work towards a better future, one that will be built in partnership, in a place of saimaqatigiingniq.

Together, we will build a stronger and more inclusive future for Canada and for Inuit.

Qujannamiik.

Thank you.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett, M.D., P.C., M.P.

