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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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• (0905)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegnà): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[Translation]

So we can proceed with the election of the chair.

[English]

I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): I nominate Maxime Bernier.

The Clerk: I have a nomination for Mr. Maxime Bernier. Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Maxime Bernier duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Bernier to take the chair, if the committee wishes we'll now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

I'm prepared to take nominations for the position of first vice-chair.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): I propose Mr. Bryon Wilfert.

The Clerk: Mr. Bryon Wilfert is nominated.

Are there other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion adopted and Mr. Bryon Wilfert duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk: I will now proceed with the election of second vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): I nominate Claude Bachand.

The Clerk: Claude Bachand has been nominated for the position of second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to.)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Claude Bachand duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

I now invite the chair to take the chair.

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): First of all, I want to thank you for electing me chair, and I would like to congratulate the two vice-chairs, Mr. Wilfert and Mr. Bachand, on their election.

[English]

I will do my best in chairing this committee, as I did in the past.

[Translation]

I will do my best to ensure that our proceedings run as efficiently as possible and that I remain as neutral and non-partisan as possible.

Thank you very much for the confidence that you have placed in me. It is an honour to serve as chair of this committee, assisted by my two vice-chairs.

[English]

Now I will ask if we have unanimous consent to go ahead and do our study on Arctic sovereignty. If we have consent, we have some witnesses who are ready to appear before us.

Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I will ask our witnesses to come in.

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami will be our first witnesses for our study on Arctic sovereignty.

We have with us Mary Simon, who is the president, and also John Merritt, *le conseiller principal en politiques*.

Welcome to our committee. You will have five to seven minutes to do your presentation. After that, the members will ask you questions. Thank you very much. You have the floor.

• (0910)

Ms. Mary Simon (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Thank you very much, and good morning. Congratulations on your election as chair.

I would like to first of all thank the standing committee for the invitation to appear today to speak to the topic of Arctic sovereignty.

You've mentioned that I have about five to seven minutes. With your indulgence, I might take a couple of extra minutes, if that's okay with the committee. It won't be much more than that.

As you said, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami—we call it ITK for short—is the national organization for the Inuit of Canada. ITK represents the Inuit who live in the four regions that make up Inuit Nunangat: the Inuvialuit region in the Beaufort Sea region, Nunavut, Nunavik in Arctic Quebec, and Nunatsiavut in Labrador.

All of the four Inuit regions that comprise Inuit Nunangat have entered into land claims agreements, modern treaties with the crown. In this context the crown represents the Canadian state and the people of Canada as a whole. These land claims agreements are protected under section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982. Land claims agreements provide much of the contemporary institutional structure to our contemporary relations with the crown, but it is important to remember that our special relationship with the crown goes back much further in history.

From the time of Martin Frobisher and continuing through centuries of voyages and activities involving naval ships, whalers, traders, missionaries, police, and public servants, Inuit have been working within a specific political and legal relationship with the crown. That relationship has been an evolving one, and the pace of that evolution has increased in recent years.

In the period leading up to the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between the crown and Inuit was a grossly one-sided one, with Inuit suffering a steady loss of control over our ability to make decisions both for ourselves and for the lands and waters that have sustained us for thousands of years. Perhaps the bottom point of this one-sided relationship was experienced in the period when Inuit households were coaxed into relocating thousands of miles in order to serve agendas developed elsewhere, and when Inuit children were taken away to residential schools. A society's loss of control cannot be illustrated more pointedly or more painfully than through the rupturing of bonds between parents and children.

In more recent years, the relationship between the crown and Inuit has regained some, if still not a complete, balance. Courts have recognized common law responsibilities of the crown in relation to such things as aboriginal title, aboriginal rights, the honour of the crown, a fiduciary relationship, and the duty to consult and accommodate.

Since 1982, aboriginal treaty rights have constitutional status and constitutional protection. Accompanying this effort to rebalance the political and legal relationship between the crown and Inuit within Canada has been a changing international understanding of how the rights and roles of states interact with the rights and roles of peoples of the world, including indigenous peoples. The rights and roles of states must now be situated alongside established and emerging concepts of fundamental human rights, both collective and individual. This new reality has figured prominently in Inuit thinking about sovereignty in the Arctic, and not just the Canadian Arctic but also the larger circumpolar Arctic.

• (0915)

Inuit are an aboriginal people of Canada, but Inuit are also an indigenous people of Greenland and Alaska and the far eastern tip of

Russia. In April of this year, Inuit from across the circumpolar world adopted a key document entitled "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic". I have brought extra copies of that document with me today, if you would care to have one. Maybe you already have it.

Section 2 of that declaration is entitled "The Evolving Nature of Sovereignty in the Arctic", and it puts forward six key propositions in that regard. Given the topic before the committee, section 2.1 is worth quoting in its entirety:

"Sovereignty" is a term that has often been used to refer to the absolute and independent authority of a community or nation both internally and externally. Sovereignty is a contested concept, however, and does not have a fixed meaning. Old ideas of sovereignty are breaking down as different governance models, such as the European Union, evolve. Sovereignities overlap and are frequently divided within federations in creative ways to recognize the rights of peoples.

For Inuit living within the states of Russia, Canada, the USA and Denmark/Greenland, issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights must be examined and assessed in the context of our long history of struggle to gain recognition and respect as an Arctic indigenous people having the right to exercise self-determination over our lives, territories, cultures and languages.

How should the Government of Canada's domestic and international policy-making for the Arctic build on the new and evolving realities identified in the Circumpolar Inuit Declaration? I would suggest there are six key things that the Parliament and Government of Canada should do.

Recommendation one is that in all its key assertions as to sovereignty and sovereign rights in relation to Arctic lands and waters, the Government of Canada should acknowledge the central importance of Inuit use and occupation of the lands and waters of Inuit Nunangat since time immemorial. The history of Inuit use has been acknowledged at various times and at various places in the past. For example, the 1930 understandings with Norway as to the Sverdrup Islands recognized the critical importance of Inuit hunting activity, and the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement expressly recognized the contributions of Nunavut Inuit to Canada's sovereignty arguments.

Consistency in acknowledging Inuit use and occupation isn't just a matter of effective advocacy before an international audience; it is also a matter of fundamental respect owed to Inuit.

Recommendation two is that coherent Government of Canada policy-making for the Arctic must be built around the idea of a core partnership relationship with Inuit. The Circumpolar Inuit Declaration put this in the following way in section 3.3 of the declaration:

The inextricable linkages between issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic and Inuit self-determination and other rights require states to accept the presence and role of Inuit as partners in the conduct of international relations in the Arctic.

The idea of partnership with Inuit is even more compelling in the domestic policy context. To be credible and constructive, partnership must be more than tokenism or lip service. Any Arctic strategy worth pursuing must put working with Inuit at its heart, not at the periphery. The current federal Arctic strategy should have been more of a collaborative writing project within an expedited timetable, on a partnership basis with Inuit.

Recommendation three is this. Partnerships that are not built on trust will always fail, and trust requires, at its most basic level, confidence that promises made are promises kept. Unfortunately, some baseline promises made to Inuit are still unfulfilled.

● (0920)

The most compelling example of this is found in the billion-dollar lawsuit that Nunavut Inuit had to initiate in the fall of 2006 because the Government of Canada would not act on a conciliation report on how to fairly implement the promises made in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. That's simply not good enough.

I'll move on to recommendation number four. The Government of Canada cannot expect the world to give full respect to arguments built on Inuit use and occupation of Arctic lands and waters when Inuit continue to lag so far behind other Canadians in relation to such things as minimum education, health, and housing standards.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Ms. Mary Simon: Okay.

The world will increasingly tie assertions of sovereignty to questions involving other expectations of the international community, including expectations as to the treatment of aboriginal minorities and regard for key environmental considerations.

Inuit are a patient and practical people. We know that the economic and social problems that we face did not come about overnight and will not be remedied overnight. We know that most of these problems are problems of history and circumstances, not prejudice or bad intentions. But we also know that sovereignty will not be enhanced if it ignores or understates the basic material needs of the permanent residents of the Arctic or if it fails to understand that the alienation of the young is the surest way to undermine respect for the law and tolerance for others. In that very real sense, sovereignty must begin at home.

I will move on to my last recommendation, which is number five.

Partnership with Inuit in the Arctic cannot be divorced from the Government of Canada's willingness or unwillingness to stand up for aboriginal rights everywhere. It is time for the Government of Canada to act in concert with the resolution adopted by the House of Commons and express its support, along with almost the entirety of the global community, for the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Government of Canada's broader reputation and capacity in relation to arctic issues would also be enhanced by the reappointment of an arctic ambassador.

Thank you very much for allowing me to give you this presentation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will ask Mr. Wilfert to start the discussion.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Bélanger.

Congratulations on your hard-fought election.

Thank you, Ms. Simon and Mr. Merritt, for coming before the committee today.

Section 4.2 talks about the need for interfacing with indigenous peoples in terms of the development of institutions in the Arctic, a multi-governance approach. You outlined a number of key points here in terms of what you see as important to enhancing the issue of sovereignty in the north. How would you describe the process to date in terms of that interface with government? And what approaches do you think should be taken to implement the type of strategies that you've put forward in order to make those key points—particularly in terms of a partnership—a reality?

● (0925)

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you very much for your question.

One of the key elements of this partnership-building that we're talking about between governments and Inuit is premised on the fact that we have settled all our land claims agreements. These land claims agreements are very comprehensive in nature and they were signed between all parties. I think there was a certain trust and expectation when these signatures were put on the legal documents.

So we have the tools already in place to be able to build that partnership, and it's very important to make sure that these agreements are being implemented in a way that allows us as Inuit to be partners with different organizations. It's not just the federal government, it's the territorial government and provincial governments. The co-management regimes and the authority that's bestowed upon us through these agreements are very important in terms of building that relationship.

The other point I want to make is that we work with the Government of Canada. Inuit have never really been against military presence in the Arctic. That's not a real issue for us, except that our agenda as Inuit is more focused on the human dimension of sovereignty, which means that alongside the infrastructure that is being built for the presence of our military and to make sure that our borders are secure, we need to build sustainable communities. As I said earlier in my presentation, Inuit have occupied the Arctic for millennia, and in many ways, as Canadians, as aboriginal people living in Canada, we were used as flag posts in the High Arctic to show that we had presence.

The Inuit won't be leaving there any time soon. We are permanent residents of the Arctic. So I think it's very important to build an agenda with the government that will help develop the capacity of our communities, where we take on the jobs that are there, where you don't always have to transport individuals into the Arctic to do all the jobs that are necessary. It means having a better education and health system, comparable to Canada. We're talking about trying to close the gap in living conditions between Inuit and other Canadians. Those go hand in hand, and I think that's a very important element of what we're talking about.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Do you think the measurements are in place to evaluate progress in these areas that you've outlined?

Ms. Mary Simon: No, there is no report card per se that is presented on an annual basis. We have asked the Government of Canada to establish a report card type of process. We raised this also with the premiers through the premiers' meeting, the confederation meeting. We've also raised it with different ministers within the Government of Canada. We feel that if we can gauge the progress that is being made, it will be easier to see how we can address the gaps.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: *Merci, monsieur le président.*

I have a great deal of interest in the concept, and the significance of the concept, "the honour of the Crown". I noticed that you mentioned it at the top of your remarks.

This is basically an open-ended question: how does your community interpret and see the concept of the honour of the crown being applied currently; how would it want to see it applied; and does it also carry beyond the borders of Canada?

Ms. Mary Simon: In terms of crossing the boundaries of Canada, no, we work within Canada, as Canadian Inuit. We have relationships that we're building with other Inuit globally on issues such as the environment and education, but we work within the perimeters of Canada.

In terms of the honour of the crown, maybe John can answer this in a more fulsome way, but the honour of the crown is very relevant to Inuit. We have signed these land claims agreements that are constitutionally protected. They are very comprehensive land claims agreements. They're signed by the crown, and we expect them to be implemented in a fashion that will be useful not only for the governments but for the people as well. So the honour of the crown and the fiduciary responsibility to Inuit is very important to us and very valid.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I will give the floor to Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome Mary Simon, who was an excellent ambassador to Denmark. Might I add that I had the pleasure of having dinner with her during one of my visits to Denmark.

Ms. Simon, I understand that you represent all of Canada's Inuit. Is that correct?

Ms. Mary Simon: Yes.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay. You talked about land claim regulations, referring to Inuvialuit in the west, Nunavut and Nunavik. What is the name of the Inuit region in Labrador?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Simon: It is Nunatsiavut.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay.

In your presentation, you also mentioned the importance of the Northern Strategy. You know that Canada has launched a strategy representing a significant investment. The Bloc Québécois recognizes that there is little flexibility and that no discussion of Arctic sovereignty can take place without Inuit at the table. That is extremely important in our view. We have repeatedly made that clear in our policies and in open letters that we have written. We recognize that you are a people. You are recognized as a people in the Canadian Constitution, for that matter.

I would like to hear your opinion, as someone who represents all Inuit, including those in Nunavik in Quebec. The seven Inuit villages north of 60, in Nunavik, are not included in the Northern Strategy and are therefore not eligible for federal assistance.

What are your thoughts on that? Have Nunavik and the province of Quebec approached you to force the federal government to include them?

In my opinion, they have a strategic position in the north. Vessels coming in from the Atlantic Ocean have to use the Hudson Strait. Quebec considers it a very serious injustice that they are not represented.

Can you tell us whether Nunavik has raised the matter with you? On your end, have you brought the matter to the attention of the federal government to correct this injustice?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you very much for your question. That is a very important question for ITK, because we represent the four regions, which include Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

When the strategy was announced, we did write to the Prime Minister and to Minister Strahl about the need to be comprehensive in terms of encompassing all Inuit regions. Whether or not we live below the 55th parallel or the 60th parallel, we face the same living conditions as people face above the 60th parallel, so it's necessary for us to work together as Inuit, first of all. We don't always deal with these jurisdictional issues when we're looking at the bigger picture, because we are one people.

We have asked the Prime Minister, and when I met with him in Iqaluit, I also raised that issue with him. We haven't had a response as to whether Nunavik and Nunatsiavut are going to be included. The only thing that has been said, really, when the map was published, is that they said they were going to fix the map. I'm not sure whether that includes the fact that they're going to change the policy to include Nunavik and Nunatsiavut in the strategy itself. We haven't received any confirmation of that, but our position is that it should. It needs to include the four regions.

● (0935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: If I understand you correctly, the Inuit region in Labrador or Newfoundland is not included in the Northern Strategy either. Only Nunavut and Inuvialuit are included in the strategy.

Do you see that as an injustice for these Inuit communities? Should they receive compensation and be included in the Northern Strategy?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Simon: Yes, they should be included in the entire strategy, because as I said, we face the same challenges as other Inuit do in the territories. This strategy is really devoted to the two territories. It's devoted to Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, which includes the Inuvialuit region. But it excludes Nunavik, which is in the province of Quebec—the tip north of the 55th parallel—except it's interesting to note that some of those communities in Nunavik are above that latitude.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Exactly.

Ms. Mary Simon: So we don't even know how that's going to be addressed. In Nunatsiavut, in northern Labrador, they are also within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, so it's not included either. Our position is that we want those regions to be included.

John is going to say a couple of words.

Mr. John Merritt (Senior Policy Advisor, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Just a supplementary piece of information. It's my understanding that last year the National Assembly of Quebec adopted a resolution urging the Government of Canada to include Nunavik in the strategy, and both Makivik and ITK welcomed that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I would just like to thank you, Ms. Simon, for the excellent job you are doing. I am very happy to see that you are also protecting the people of Nunavik and Labrador in an effort to include them in the Northern Strategy. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

[*English*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome to you, Mary Simon. I'm very glad you're here. It was I who urged the committee to bring you here, and I'm very proud to tell my fellow colleagues that you hail from Nunatsiavut,

the translation of which, as I understand it, is “our beautiful land”. Thank you for coming, and thank you for all the work you do.

I find it disconcerting as a Canadian, knowing the effort and the length of time that goes into land claims negotiations—I know it was over 30 years in the case of Nunatsiavut—that you end up having to sue the government to implement them. I know what it takes for people to sign this kind of agreement, because it is a permanent decision. I'm extremely disheartened to know that has happened, and also that the government has failed—one of the few countries in the world that has failed—to sign on to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It makes it very hard to see a partnership coming under these circumstances.

Is the failure to sign the UN declaration meaningful in practical ways, other than the symbolic importance? Does that have any effect on the rights of the Inuit, or is it something that's more important from a recognition effect?

Ms. Mary Simon: I think I'll let John answer part of that question, but I will start by saying it's more than symbolic. It has had the effect, where countries have signed, of starting to help shape the domestic policies within those countries. Countries that have embraced it are using it as a standard-setting process within their borders, so it's a very useful tool.

In regard to the international context, I think John is probably more able to answer that question, because it has some legal connotations to it.

● (0940)

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you, sir.

ITK found the arguments that Canada put forward in the run-up to the adoption of the declaration quite curious, because in the run-up to the votes in New York in September 2007 there appeared to be an argument that adoption of the declaration would cause legal mayhem in Canada. In fact, there was even reference to elements of the National Defence Act somehow being subject to question.

Once the declaration was adopted by votes from every country except four, the federal government's posture seemed to go in the exact opposite direction. The argument has been that the declaration has no effect in Canada. So we went from an argument that the declaration would have huge impact in Canada to a position that it would have no impact in Canada. We found that both very curious and very unconvincing.

The reality is that most international lawyers would agree that the declaration does have status in Canada. It is part of the international human rights architecture. Human rights instruments are not subject to countries opting in and out. If that were the case, there would be very few reliable human rights standards anywhere in the globe.

It's my understanding that two judges in Canada have already recited the relevance of the declaration in efforts to interpret Canadian law. Obviously it does not have the force of a formal treaty or statute, but it does have significance in international law, and Canada does operate within that arena of international law.

We've already seen one of the four countries that expressed opposition change its position—that is, Australia—and there's some indication that both New Zealand and the United States are reconsidering their positions. So Canada may end up very much alone.

Mr. Jack Harris: So this could be an important first step, I gather from what you're saying, Ms. Simon, in the building of a trust and the potential of a partnership on sovereignty in the Arctic.

I'm interested in your point on the inclusion of Nunavik and Nunatsiavut in the northern strategy. The arbitrary nature of the Arctic Circle doesn't define the Inuit people in Canada and perhaps shouldn't be allowed to define a northern strategy. Nunatsiavut is on the route north, and the conditions in terms of ice, weather, and the lives of people are very similar.

A lot of our talk in this committee has been about climate change. Obviously it has some significant effects on the way of life of the Inuit in Canada. Is there a problem on the development side? Will the need for more small harbour or wharf development be more important as conditions change? Is it something that would be on your agenda, as far as the kinds of expectations you would have from a northern strategy and a northern sovereignty effort are concerned?

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you for your question.

Anything that will reduce the cost of living up north is of interest to us. The building of small harbours is part of that, so we support the idea that more than one would be built.

Going back to what you were saying about the Northwest Passage opening up, just to illustrate how we see the partnership that needs to be built around what's happening, that could be related to climate change, because many things are changing. We feel that climate change is having a serious impact on our ability to live traditionally in the Arctic as a people. Many things have changed.

But I think it would be very productive to explore the possibility of a joint Inuit-federal government Northwest Passage authority. It would offer a proactive regulatory regime against the expected increase in ship traffic, for instance, while at the same time respecting the history of Inuit use and the central importance of sustainable economic development for Inuit communities.

We're really trying to build a better education system that will then support a better economic base for our people. They're intertwined, so when you talk about the Northwest Passage and the possibility of the exploration that might take place in the High Arctic, this is something we see as being very useful.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You don't have any—

Mr. Jack Harris: The partnership idea of the development of sovereignty is a very interesting one, and that's a great practical example. I wish we had more time to explore other aspects of that, but maybe other people will ask questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Now we'll give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you both for coming. It's an interesting topic.

I'd like to bring it back, though, to the topic we're discussing in a broader sense, and that's Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic on behalf of all Canadians, including the Inuit people. Obviously the Inuit people have a very important role to play, based on history and geography.

First of all, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is the lead agency in Canadian Arctic sovereignty. How do you view that: good, bad, encouraging? How do you see that playing out with them, not the Department of National Defence, as the lead agency?

Ms. Mary Simon: We're not biased against any one department as long as we can have a meaningful relationship with a federal government department that's really respecting our wishes. I think with INAC, it's more related to the human dimension, which we often talk about, whereas Defence would be more in terms of the military. We do have our northern Rangers who are very active, and we're very supportive of the fact that they got more support for what they do for the military in the Arctic. I think that was a very important announcement, where our northern Rangers are going to have increased support. That part of it is also tied to their ability to bring an income to their families, so any kind of job is always very good for us.

I don't really have a strong view about which department we would prefer to work with. I think the federal government as a whole has a fiduciary responsibility and has signed these land claims agreements. Many departments are part of those agreements and need to be more engaged in how we implement these agreements. I think that's really the bottom line; more than one department has to look at how we implement these agreements. They need to be engaged in the process and not just have junior representatives in committee meetings and in discussions that we've had. We want it to be at a more senior level where the decisions can be made.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Those are all good points, and that's why the Government of Canada, I suggest, has made Indian and Northern Affairs the lead agency. It's a recognition of the importance of the Inuit people in the north.

I've spent time with the Rangers, and it's a wonderful organization.

There are going to be a lot of opportunities stemming from development, whether it's construction or just presence, an increase in Rangers and so on. Could you discuss some of the opportunities that you see coming from our emphasis on Arctic sovereignty on behalf of all Canadians and how that might specifically impact on the welfare of your people?

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you for that question.

Sovereignty has impacted our people for many years. I don't know if you know this, but in the early 1950s our people from Nunavik, from northern Quebec, which is where I come from, were relocated into the High Arctic. The government, maybe not this present government, but the federal government has acknowledged that yes, Inuit played an integral role in the assertion of sovereignty. So we have been impacted by the sovereignty issue for many years.

What we're trying to do now is have more control over how that plays out in terms of our own lives, because people were moved without consenting to be moved. I think that in 2009 we're at the stage where we do have these land claims agreements, we do have different authorities that represent Inuit, like ITK. We have the Makivik Corporation, we have the Nunavut Tunngavik, we have the Inuvialuit region, and now we have the Nunatsiavut government. They all have authority over their territories. I think it's really incumbent upon all of us to make sure that these processes work so the lives of our people at the community level are not being adversely affected the way they were years ago. Very big traumas were experienced in those days, and we don't want to see that happen again. The only way we can have some assurances is to work together on these issues.

• (0950)

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: I agree, and obviously the welfare of your people translates to your being able to play a larger role in the north and therefore enhance Canadian sovereignty on behalf of all Canadians and, more specifically, the Inuit people. Is that a fair statement?

Ms. Mary Simon: That's a fair statement. In fact, that's what I was saying when I did my cross-Canada tour.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: You mentioned education and opportunities and so on. Obviously because of geography there are some challenges there. What's your vision of education for the Inuit people in the north?

Ms. Mary Simon: That's a very important question.

We have just embarked on a national process to improve Inuit education across the Canadian Arctic, and I'm the chair of the process. What we're going to do is look at how well we've done in education, where some of the failures have been, where the successes are. We want to build on our successes and identify the gaps. So we have embarked on a pan-Arctic process, and Makivik is very involved in that, and the Kativik school board in Nunavik and the Nunatsiavut government also. So it's all the regions, and it has been signed by Minister Strahl on behalf of the Government of Canada. And we are also urging the provinces that have Inuit living in them to participate, such as Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec. We had a representative from the Newfoundland government. They haven't signed the accord, but they were there and they participated, so that's important.

So we are embarking on this initiative because I think it's at the core of all the issues we face. Our young population numbers are very high, and if we can't get well-educated adults coming out of our school system, the jobs are always going to be taken up by those who move into the Arctic and then leave again because it's not their home. I think that in order to have sustainable communities, we have to educate. Our graduation rate right now for high school is 23%. So

61% don't finish high school. You know, when he was up in the Arctic this summer, the Prime Minister asked me a lot of questions about that, and he was really surprised to see that most of the people working out there where he went were non-native, were non-Inuit. He wanted to know why.

The Chair: *Merci bien, Madame Simon.*

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Dhaliwal, please.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, congratulations on your election today.

And thank you to you, Mary Simon and John Merritt, for being at the witness table here.

The work you're doing is good, but I'm going to continue with education. I personally feel it should be the fundamental right of every Canadian to acquire that. You mentioned 23%; that is a very low rate when it comes to graduation. How could we deal with education differently, so that Inuit people will be able to compete in the international market in future years?

• (0955)

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you for that. Education is the key component of that, and we are trying to set up an education system that will embrace our culture and language, where we will use our mother tongue as a teaching language, and our history and our culture will be integrated into our education system. That's our goal and that's our mission. We know that other aboriginal cultures, indigenous cultures—for instance, the Maori in New Zealand—have been successful in turning their whole education system around so that now they teach only in the Maori language. So it's doable, and we feel very lucky because our language is still pretty strong.

So we have an opportunity to do that, and I think that's where we really need to work with the federal government, the territorial governments, and the provinces to make sure we are moving towards that goal. It won't happen overnight, but it can happen.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: For your information, actually, I brought in a private member's bill, the only private member's bill I tabled. It was to recognize mother tongues. There are over 6,500 different mother tongue languages spoken in Canada besides the two official languages. That is a good point you brought forward.

This spring I met with the chair of the Churchill port authority, who mentioned the fact that there was literally no framework for environmental regulations developed by the government. The Arctic will get more port traffic in the coming years, and there is also very little planning done on how to drive economic development in this particular region.

Could you comment on that? Would you say that any plans around the defence strategy have to be part of the broader and more comprehensive strategy for Arctic development?

Ms. Mary Simon: I'll let John deal with the defence side.

When I was talking about this proposal for a joint Inuit-federal government authority that would be proactive, I think those are some of the issues that a joint committee would address. I think environmental issues are part of that. If there is a shipping accident or an oil spill, there has to be some kind of regime set up. We feel that we need to be part of that process because it would affect our communities. Our communities are all coastal communities. We surround the coasts.

John.

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you.

ITK acknowledges, as President Simon mentioned a moment ago, that the Arctic is a high-cost area and public investment is limited. So one has to make the best use of resources.

Insofar as pursuing a sovereignty strategy and a defence strategy in the north is concerned, it makes sense to try to make federal investments as multi-purpose as possible. That means consciously trying to wed civilian and military objectives. There are many examples where we think a creative agenda can actually serve a variety of ends.

We talked a moment ago about small craft harbours. It clearly makes a lot of sense to invest in small craft harbours. Those harbours are important for surveillance, monitoring, and environmental protection purposes. They're also important for reducing the cost of bringing goods into the communities. They're important for regional economic development purposes.

Associated with that is the expansion of the commercial fishery in the Arctic. There is the nucleus of an Inuit fishery, a commercial fishery. Their prospects are bright. There is some hope that the turbid allocations will increase in the next 12 months. It would make sense to have an Inuit-owned resident commercial fishery in the Arctic. Every boat that goes out watching those waters is evidence of Canadian use and occupation.

We talked earlier about the Rangers. Certainly the Rangers are a valuable part of Canada's defence policy, and the expansion of the Rangers program is welcome. In theory, the Rangers program could also be more consciously multi-purpose. In addition to environmental observation, you could in fact expand that program to allow Rangers to help in bringing country food back to the communities. There are some reports that say one in every two Inuit households goes hungry once a year. That's a shocking figure.

So multi-purpose investments would help.

● (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will have to give the floor to Mr. Boughen, please.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Chair; and congratulations on that landslide victory.

John and Mary, let me add my voice to those of my colleagues in welcoming you this morning and thanking you for taking time out of your day to spend some time with us.

Mary, I thought you said there were six recommendations. You spelled out five. Maybe I heard wrong; maybe you mentioned "five" and I heard "six".

Out of the five recommendations you mentioned, I wonder if part of the problem in creating the change is that the Arctic is experiencing a rapid change. From dog teams and sleighs to snow machines, and young people who hunted and lived off the land now fighting drug addictions, just that whole environmental impact has caused a significant change in lifestyle of the Arctic.

When you look at what you need to bring this together, what would be your first recommendation? You talked about land claims; you talked about health, education, and government partnerships. What do you see as the first order of business?

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you very much.

You are right that I said there were six recommendations. I felt I was going over my time, so I didn't go into my sixth recommendation. But I actually brought it into our discussion, and it's the one where we might explore a more productive relationship by possibly creating this joint Inuit-federal government Northwest Passage authority. That was the sixth recommendation.

Let me address the bigger picture you just laid out. There are many factors regarding why our young people are not doing as well as they should. There is the fact that our school system needs to be improved. We need better social and health system services. We don't have services for mental health. The suicide rate is seven times greater than in the rest of Canada, and it's mostly young men who are committing suicide. We don't have a mental health service in the north; it's non-existent in many areas because, as you know, our communities are very remote. There are no roads. The smaller the community, the less service they get. Mental health has been one of the key priorities in the development of our health services—not to diminish the other health factors as well.

Education is another one.

On climate change, we need adaptation programs. The climate is changing rapidly in the Arctic. We can't do anything about it; it's not really in our hands, and yet we have no real ability to help people adapt to those changes. You are right that it is having an impact.

So when you put all of these things together, it's very difficult for me to say what the number one priority is, because all of these factors are interrelated.

We have communities that are going to have to be relocated because of climate change. One of them is in Nunavik, where Salluit is a community that is sinking.

These are very big issues for our communities.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Would you say that any single one of these issues should have been addressed yesterday? Are health care, regional hospitals, or walk-in health clinics more important right here and now, or is the educational process more important now, because those two seem to be two big issues?

Ms. Mary Simon: I would say mental health and education.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will give the floor to Monsieur Bachand.

Monsieur Bachand, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Over the course of our deliberations, we have tried to examine the sovereignty issue to some extent. Land occupation is a very important consideration. It seems that no one disputes the fact that Inuit have occupied the land in the north since time immemorial.

But there are other avenues that we are also pursuing. There is the whole issue of the extension of the continental shelf. As you know, in 2013, Canada will have to make its proposal and explain how it sees the issue. Furthermore, an additional 300,000 km were recognized as belonging to Norway.

And there is the whole matter of land control, and I would like to hear your thoughts on that. In terms of the Northern Strategy, we, the Bloc Québécois, find there is a lot of talk about militarizing the north. I think I heard you say earlier that you are not opposed to having a bit of a stronger military presence in the north. One of the measures put forward by the government is the modernization of the Rangers. You cannot object to that.

But I would like to hear your thoughts on the military training centre in Resolute Bay, the building of a deep-water port in Nanisivik, the presence of an ice-breaker, the new offshore patrol ships and the Polar Epsilon project, which, along with RADARSAT-2, will monitor and track vessels entering and travelling through the Northwest Passage.

Do you acknowledge that the issue of land control can go as far as to include the range of military measures put forward by the government? On one hand, do you share that opinion? On the other, are you consulted on all the dynamics when a decision is made to do this or that? Are your governments consulted? Does Canada ask for your help with all of these projects?

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Simon.

Ms. Mary Simon: I'm going to defer the answer to John.

Mr. John Merritt: Well, you'll be either disappointed or relieved to know that ITK doesn't actually have somebody who works full time on military issues per se, so by definition, my response will have to be somewhat general.

On your last point about consultation, ITK has minimal input into the Arctic strategy, and that was a major disappointment. As you heard from President Simon, a test of partnership is doing things together, and in the absence of the Inuit having a central role in the development of Arctic strategy, it's hard for the Inuit to believe that the strategy will reflect Inuit priorities. That covers everything.

In terms of military investments, as President Simon said, Inuit have supported Canada taking steps to demonstrate to the world that it has an active program to discharge responsibilities in the Arctic. Where possible, it's important that military investments be married to civilian purposes. Insofar as we can serve civilian agendas and military agendas at the same time, that's a better use of investment.

How much military investment is too much in comparison with what's being spent on education and health is obviously a core issue. I think there is a sense that the civilian agenda has been left behind

and that there are investments that should be made on the social policy side that aren't being made. The Nunavut Inuit lawsuit, which we talked about earlier, speaks precisely to that point. Justice Berger completed a fine report in 2006, as conciliator, that said that the only way forward in the Nunavut project was to heighten investments in education and training and that there is a connection between language retention and education. NTI made that lawsuit. ITK supports that lawsuit, and we hope there will be a negotiated outcome.

Radar satellites fit into, perhaps, an alternative way of looking at the Northwest Passage, which came up earlier. The possibility of some kind of joint Inuit–Government of Canada passage authority would be a novel but interesting idea worth exploring. We have a St. Lawrence Seaway Authority on a bilateral basis with the United States. The partnership with the Inuit is surely as important in the Arctic as our relationship with the United States is on our southern border.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Merritt.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I want to raise a point of order, if I may, Mr. Chair.

Would it be possible to obtain the details of Ms. Simons's six priorities in both official languages—I discussed it earlier with the clerk. I think it will be an important part of our report. I just wanted to make sure that the request was recorded.

The Chair: Yes, we can get that in both official languages. Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Payne.

[*English*]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My congratulations on your landslide, as well as congratulations to the vice-chairs on their landslides.

Welcome to our visitors today. It's very important that we hear from the Inuit in the north.

I really would like to direct my questions and have your thoughts in terms of the recent creation of the Northern Economic Development Agency in our 2009 budget economic action plan. I'm wondering if you could have a look at that and share your thoughts on how that funding will assist the Inuit in jobs in the north and in creating opportunities there.

Ms. Mary Simon: Part of the establishment of the Northern Economic Development Agency, which is part of the Arctic strategy, is based on the renewal of some programs that existed in the past that were getting to the end of their agreements. So there has been a renewal of some of those programs, which are very useful to some of our economic development that goes on in the north. Because of the fact that these programs are being moved into this agency and are being managed by northerners—that's the hope—they will be more hands-on, and we'll be able to determine better how to continue using existing programs that have been renewed. I think there are two or three of them.

In terms of new money, I don't think there really was any new money announced with the creation of this agency. I think it's \$10 million over ten years. It's been created to organize the programs that are there and to move it into the north so that northerners can have more of a hands-on approach to the whole program. As far as I know, there was no new money announced.

Mr. LaVar Payne: There are a number of projects that have been announced, like the harbour and those types of things. I'm just wondering how those will impact the ability for the Inuit and the young to get jobs there and create some wealth and economic opportunities for the Inuit.

Ms. Mary Simon: I think, sir, it depends on what is being built. In terms of the small harbour development, there may be some opportunities for some local employment. It depends on the training that has been achieved by the individuals.

We're concerned about the research station that's going to be built in the Arctic. We feel it's not tailored at this point to the particular needs of northerners, because research has always been in the hands of academics and people with PhDs. Our people don't have that, but we have a very strong knowledge base that we'd like to make sure is used in the decision-making process. We haven't really seen how that will be integrated into the development of the large research station that is anticipated to be built in the Arctic.

I go back to education again, because unless our young people are more academically educated, they will not participate in those projects, except in the menial jobs.

• (1015)

The Chair: I'm sorry, your time has expired.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, the genesis for this discussion and report that we're doing has to do with the impact that climate change is having on the north and the impact on sovereignty issues and the military. In terms of the expertise, there's obviously a wealth of expertise in the north. We've seen impacts on habitat and migration issues. How can we best tap into that in terms of being able to develop constructive and useful recommendations, not only for government but also in dealing with many of the social implications that we see with regard to climate change in the north?

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you for that question.

The simple answer is work with us and talk to us. We have people who have a lot of expertise. For instance, in the Nunavut government they have a department that specializes in Inuit traditional knowledge. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, ITK, is also setting up an Inuit

knowledge centre where we can provide expertise on Arctic and Inuit issues. So I think if we can work together to build that, you will have the type of information you need in order to find that balance.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: So we need to either create or enhance structures that will facilitate the flow of information, then have the appropriate follow-up to ensure that the information that is given is actually utilized.

Ms. Mary Simon: Yes, that's absolutely correct.

We don't need to set up new structures. We have structures in place. We have regional research organizations. We work with ArcticNet in terms of research on climate change.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: How effective are they in terms of your ability to channel that information?

Ms. Mary Simon: ArcticNet do wonderful work on the hard sciences, but we feel their social science agenda is weak and we're trying to build it right now. We're going to have another meeting next week. But it is weak on that side of it, so we continue to try to build it.

But we do have research agencies in each of the northern regions that can provide a lot of information right now.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: You mentioned the comment about the need to reappoint an Arctic ambassador. What do you see as the value of that ambassador? How would that ambassador play a role, in your view, in dealing not only with issues of sovereignty but also, and in particular, with the implications for climate change in the north?

Ms. Mary Simon: Well, sir, I guess I'm in a good position to answer that question—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Yes, that's true. That's why I asked you.

Ms. Mary Simon: —since I was the first ambassador. I was there for 10 years. What I found was that it was extremely useful to have a strong senior focal point in the government.

I know that Minister Cannon has said he is the person responsible, but I found that on a day-to-day basis working within the department, and also with other countries because we're a member of the Arctic Council, it was always very important to have a focal point so that people could come and talk to you about the issues. I think that was really the strength of Canada's participation in the Arctic Council, as well as in dealing with other issues on the Arctic.

I found it extremely useful to be able to talk to the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister, as well as the minister on occasion, about some of the priorities that were being expressed by northern people, not just by Inuit but by northern people. I've always felt that it was a very important position.

• (1020)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: *C'est fini?*

The Chair: For your last question, you still have 30 seconds. You can thank her.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I'll definitely thank you, Ms. Simon, but I hope we're going to keep the channels of communication open in terms of any further written information that you can provide us, particularly on the impact of climate change.

It's about the climate change issue and the effect on sovereignty, and we're seeing what's happening in Greenland and other places in terms of how we need to have a multilateral approach to the issues and what will happen, not just in the immediate future but down the road. How do we prepare for that?

Thank you.

Ms. Mary Simon: Thank you very much.

Could I respond, sir?

The Chair: In 10 seconds, yes, quickly.

Ms. Mary Simon: We have an organization called the Inuit Circumpolar Council, and the Canada arm is involved in the negotiations for the Copenhagen meeting. I think they're going to be part of the Canadian delegation. So yes, we need to keep those channels open.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Congratulations on your re-election.

As the new member on the committee, I just want to say I'm very pleased to be here and I look forward to working with all of you.

Madam Simon and Mr. Merritt, thank you very much for your time today and, for that matter, this week. I found your presentation very helpful and very informative.

I'd like to touch on perhaps two or three different areas, if I have the time. I'll begin by elaborating on Mr. Payne's question on CanNor, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. It's clear, and I'm certainly aware—and it's clear from your presentation—that there's still a lot of work to do in the Arctic, particularly in the areas of human and social development, in health, education, etc. You very eloquently covered that.

However, I hope you would agree that the level of interest in the Arctic and the level of concern for the Arctic from this government is unprecedented. One of the expressions of that is the new creation of CanNor. I think it is significant that CanNor will be based in the north, in Iqaluit, and will help to bring greater focus to the impact of the programs under the CanNor umbrella.

Have you given any thought to how you might leverage the establishment of CanNor in the north and the greater focus of those programs?

Ms. Mary Simon: First of all, I think it'll be important to make sure we cover all the Inuit regions. That's a big issue for us, that it covers all four Inuit regions. Without that, some of our regions will be absent from those discussions, so I think it's really important to resolve that issue. As for how you do it, I guess there are different options that can be explored, and with the province as well, not just with the Inuit.

Yes, I applaud the Prime Minister for coming to the Arctic every year. I think it's very important that the Prime Minister of Canada does raise the profile of the Arctic region, and CanNor, by being located in the north, will be beneficial. We need to make sure that all of this translates not just into building a big military presence in the Arctic, but into a balance between defence and what John calls the civilization aspect: the people, and building sustainable communities. We are encouraging the government and the Prime Minister to put a stronger emphasis on the social agenda of the Arctic. It's very much needed.

Mr. Peter Braid: With respect to the Northwest Passage and your recommendation on a joint authority, could you tell us why the monitoring of the Northwest Passage, and participating in the process, is so important to you and your people.

Ms. Mary Simon: As Canadian citizens, it's of concern to us. We are Canadian taxpayers, just like people in the rest of Canada. We carry passports. As citizens of this country, it is of extreme importance that we safeguard our sovereignty. That's one aspect of it.

The other aspect is related to economic development and building sustainable communities. We are quite successful in economic development in many areas—with the airline industry, the fishing industry, and so on. But these are fairly large-scale economic development opportunities that we invest in. What we need is more economic development at the local level. How do we support that smaller-scale economic development? The cost of living is so exorbitant that whenever anybody tries to start up an enterprise they go under, because they can't make ends meet. These are things that we need to look at on a smaller scale. How do we engage each other to make sure this is happening? It's a multi-layered agenda.

•(1025)

The Chair: I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris, who will be the last member. After that I will suspend our work and we will come back to discuss the e-mail you have in front of you. I don't think it will take long.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You spoke of the Prime Minister's visit to the Arctic. There had been military manoeuvres in the Arctic in the summertime. One of the difficulties—this is in the news—is that some of the military exercises couldn't be done because of weather and ice conditions. I'm reminded of the history of Arctic exploration and the visit of Captain Bob Bartlett to the North Pole a hundred years ago. The success of the Peary expedition to the North Pole was dependent on the involvement of the Inuit.

The Inuit have much traditional knowledge of ice and weather and Arctic living. Is there a role for this knowledge, and is that role being encouraged, in relation to the activities of the military in the north? The Rangers have a limited function, I would say. Could you comment on the use of Inuit knowledge in the defence context?

Ms. Mary Simon: I'll go back to—

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may add, with respect to the Northwest Passage, we're talking about ships going through there. Obviously ice conditions, weather conditions, expectations of weather changes are extremely important.

Ms. Mary Simon: I would have to go back to the fact that we knowingly signed these comprehensive land claims agreements. We signed them because we felt that we needed the tools contained in these comprehensive agreements. We needed those tools to build partnerships with the federal government and other governments. These agreements set out many ways that the Inuit could participate in different regimes. As for the Northwest Passage, environmental issues are of great concern to Inuit. Climate change is having a serious impact on our people with respect to living conditions and our traditional pursuits for a livelihood. We still depend on the countryside's food for most of our protein, since there are no stores in the communities that carry affordable food.

Traditionally, Inuit have a deep knowledge of the marine mammals and how they travel through the Arctic Ocean. Those are things that are embraced in our knowledge base. This knowledge is important in planning the use of the Northwest Passage.

I don't know if John has additional comments.

• (1030)

Mr. John Merritt: ITK would expect that the world would view Canadian efforts with more credibility if Canadian efforts were focused around an active partnership with Inuit. There are special arrangements already in international law. The Law of the Sea has

provisions in relation to ice-covered waters. We have instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. If Canada were to tell the world that it will discharge its environmental and management responsibilities for the passage in a way that builds on an active partnership with Inuit, we think that would have more credibility than just a raw assertion of sovereignty based on 19th century concepts.

We think that's a more contemporary and a more defensible posture. It would be much more likely to generate support for Canada's position that these waters are internal and not subject to a transit passage.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the committee today. I am sure that your testimony will serve us well in our study of Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

[*English*]

Thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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