

STATEMENT FOR CANADA'S FOURTH UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (PRE-SESSION) 2023

Geneva, August 31, 2023

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Food insecurity among Inuit in Canada is one of the longest lasting public health emergencies in Canadian history.¹ Over 75% of Inuit in Nunavut are reported to be food insecure.² The average cost to feed a family is two to three times the national average, making it the most expensive in Canada.³ As a result, Inuit face the highest documented rates of food insecurity among an Indigenous population in a developed nation.⁴

Food insecurity in the Inuit homelands, has been linked to high rates of suicide, which for Inuit is 9 times higher than the national average.⁵ This high rate of suicide rose in direct correlation with the economic collapse that the sealskin industry experienced when the European Economic Community banned sealskin and sealskin products in 1983.⁶

These statistics underscore the severity of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat and the urgent need for effective interventions that are rooted in Inuit societal values and self-determination, this is because food insecurity is a symptom of a lack of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is the right to culturally appropriate foods harvested through sustainable means and can only be achieved when Inuit have control over their own food systems.

During Canada's last UPR cycle, 93 recommendations were made addressing issues impacting Indigenous peoples, however only two recommendations were made on the issue of the right to food among Indigenous communities. Highlighting the need to achieve Inuit food sovereignty,

¹ National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, p.3-4.

https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf

² Qikiqtani Inuit Association (2019), *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*, p. 2.

<https://www.qia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Food-Sovereignty-and-Harvesting.pdf>

³ National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, p.17.

https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf

⁴Qikiqtani Inuit Association (2019), *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*, p. 2.

<https://www.qia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Food-Sovereignty-and-Harvesting.pdf> ; The scope of this strategy kit will focus on policy changes tailored for Nunavut, however it's hoped that the material can be adapted to other regions in Inuit Nunangat in the future.

⁵Statistics Canada. (2019, June), *Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (2011-2016): Findings from the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort (CanCHEC)*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/99-011-x/99-011-x2019001-eng.htm>.

⁶George W. Wenzel. "Animal Rights, Human Rights: Ecology, Economy and Ideology in the Canadian Arctic." University of Toronto Press, 1991.

we have four recommendations. The first is to create and adequately fund hunting as a paid profession in Inuit Nunangat, this would improve food access, and foster culturally-relevant economic development in the region. This would be an act of reconciliation and an important step towards repairing the harm created by previous and ongoing colonial policies that have created this crisis such as forced relocations and the killing of sled dogs.

Our second recommendation is to create and adequately fund targeted basic income in Inuit Nunangat because much like anywhere else in Canada, the issue of food insecurity is an issue of income disparity. Non-Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat earn close to four times the income of their Inuit counterparts. A guaranteed basic income has the potential to significantly reduce poverty in the region and dramatically increase the quality of life.

Our third recommendation is to build essential infrastructure in the region, which has the worst infrastructure deficit in the country. This contributes to the region's lack of food access, stunts economic development and strains the region's already limited healthcare system. To address these gaps, there is an urgent need to develop infrastructure, including public assets like marine and air infrastructure, harvesting and food processing facilities, housing, and water and sanitation. The most pressing infrastructure deficit in Inuit Nunangat is the region's lack of affordable and safe housing. Presently, 52% of Inuit in their homelands live in overcrowded housing.

Our final recommendation is to recognize Inuktitut and other indigenous languages as official languages of Canada. Inuit traditional knowledge and culture is embedded within Inuit languages, such as Inuktitut and Innuinaqtun. This includes vital knowledge about hunting and harvesting. However, Inuktitut is on the decline. Currently, Canada only recognizes French and English as the nation's official languages. Although the Indigenous Languages Act was passed, the protections afforded to Indigenous languages are not comparable to that of an official language. This continues Canada's disparate treatment of Indigenous peoples rights and culture and should be rectified.