

INUIT TAPIRISAT OF CANADA

Presentation To

Arctic Corridor Conference

Churchill, Manitoba

May 7 - 10, 1973

Rt. Hon. Pierre E. Trudeau
The Prime Minister of Canada

Hon. Jean Chrétien
Minister of Indian Affairs
& Northern Development,

We appreciate the invitation to attend and participate in this 'Churchill Arctic Corridor Conference' convened by your 'Great Plains Project'.

On several occasions in the past, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (I.T.C.) and other native peoples' organizations north of 60°, have specifically requested a temporary freeze on exploration and development, until several other matters have been dealt with satisfactorily.

Of primary importance in this regard, from the standpoint of all of the organizations, is the matter of a fair and reasonable settlement of land claims. Of equal importance is the question of appropriate assurances, based upon competent research and data, that the northern environment and ecology will receive adequate and appropriate protection from the impact of exploration and development.

Our energies have been consumed for the most part until recently in trying to get recognition by the federal Government that we have rights in the north. Until February 14th, 1973, there had not been recognition by the Government of aboriginal rights. On that date, the agreement of the Prime Minister to negotiate a settlement with the non-treaty Yukon native peoples implied that such recognition has now been given. To that point in time, there had been an express and

categorical denial of any rights on the part of native peoples in respect to their lands north of 60° (apart from, perhaps, the literal treaty rights through Treaties 8 and 11). A recent example of such denial is contained in the 1972 Pipeline Guidelines issued June 28, 1972.

It appears that as of February 14, 1973, the Government is prepared to recognize rights on the part of native people in respect to the lands and waters traditionally used and occupied. We say "appears" because the Government has not expressly said what can be easily said - "This Government is prepared to recognize aboriginal rights and enter into a fair legislative settlement of aboriginal claims".

The Government has kindly funded the I.T.C. land claims project. The I.T.C. is actively working on this project and is preparing a proposal for a settlement of Inuit land claims. The Government has also recently announced that it may well fund a contract for research as to Inuit land use and occupancy. We thank the Government, and Mr. Jean Chrétien in particular, for the imagination and initiative in making these projects possible. The Government deserves considerable credit for funding native peoples' organizations generally which makes possible briefs such as this one, which can be sharply critical of Government policies.

These two mentioned projects are two of the significant building blocks for any and all policy in relation to the Inuit for some years to come.

The Government has also suggested that the Inuit and other native peoples will not be prejudiced in respect to eventual land claims settlements by virtue of prior exploration and development. Although we do not question the sincerity in making these statements, we cannot believe that we will not in fact be prejudiced significantly by continuing exploration and development prior to a fair settlement of our claims. Firstly, exploration and development involve an obvious physical impact upon the lands, waters, communities and peoples and to some considerable extent, no matter what changes might be made in future policy, this impact is irreversible.

Secondly, given the large expenditure of dollars and energy in exploration and development, we cannot naively believe that the oil and gas industry, probably the world's largest industry (and probably also the most significant - undisclosed - contributor to the major political parties in both Canada and the United States) would allow the Canadian Government to change a policy already embarked upon to any significant degree. To take an example, we cannot see the federal Government asking Imperial Oil (Standard Oil of New Jersey) to give back Atkinson Point to the people of Tuktoyaktuk, nor do we believe the Government has other than a 'theoretical' power to ask Imperial Oil to do so. Such a situation is only a symptom of the much larger events of many exploratory and development activities already happening, or coming, north of 60°⁰, which as a practical matter, prevent and make unrealistic any significant changes in policy in the future, no matter how desirable they may be.

Therefore, we expressly request, as we have before, that there be a freeze immediately imposed in respect to all exploration and development activities by the oil and gas industry of any nature whatsoever in the Northwest Territories as of the end of the present winter season. The request for a temporary freeze on exploration and development has been made to the Government on previous occasions, and is also implicit in present actions by different communities and groups. For example, there have been specific refusals in respect to intended exploration activities recently by the Inuit communities of Tuktoyaktuk (Cape Bathurst), Southampton Island, Spence Bay, Grise Fiord, Holman Island, and Coppermine. Also, the treaty Indian people of the Northwest Territories have recently placed a caveat in respect to the lands which they claim to have traditionally used and occupied so as to obtain a temporary freeze.

Such a temporary freeze would be in the best interests of the people of the Northwest Territories, and Canada generally. The freeze would be imposed until the following has been accomplished:

(1) The aboriginal rights of the native peoples have been expressly recognized and their claims have been settled by way of a fair and reasonable legislative settlement.

(2) New mechanisms are developed to provide native peoples, and the public generally, with the means and opportunity of effective and meaningful participation in decision - making as to all aspects of Northern development.

(3) A comprehensive lands and water use plan for the entire Northwest Territories has been prepared, which includes all considerations, including those of the native peoples and their lands and waters, game preserves, ecological preserves, national parks, local government areas (development control zones), etc.

(4) An economic policy has been developed for the North, through a process which involves the full participation of the native peoples.

(5) A national energy policy has been developed.

We believe the above request to be an absolute prerequisite to orderly development north of 60°, in the best interests of all Canadians. We emphasize that we are only requesting a temporary freeze. We are not opposed to orderly and controlled exploration and development after the above policies and settlements have been determined.

We are not prepared to accept an assertion that we will not be prejudiced by continuing exploration and development prior to the determination of the policies and settlements above mentioned. Exploration and development to date, and any continuing activities in this regard until such policies and settlements are completed, have been entirely without our approval, consent, or authorization. Such activities are expressly against the wishes of the northern native peoples, as expressed through their organizations. These organizations represent about two-thirds of the total population of the Northwest Territories.

The responsibility for continuing these exploration and development activities rests solely with the present Government.

The Government has come some considerable way from its original refusal to recognize our rights in respect to the lands and waters in the Northwest Territories. The sincerity of what appears to be a new policy in this regard (as of February 14th, 1973) and the sincerity and good intentions as to the actual role of the native peoples in respect to northern exploration and development generally (as always stated to be the first consideration in Government statements and Government policy papers) will be determined by, and is dependent upon, the answer to our request. It is time to move from a continuing policy of simply rushing ahead blindly with exploration and development with only responses to specific problems after they arise (for example, the MacKenzie Highway) to comprehensive policy planning in advance of further northern exploration and development, in the interests of all Canadians. A dramatic new philosophy is needed for northern development, being one which truly puts the economic value of exploitation of natural resources in a proper context of being simply a subservient interest to the more important, longer-range, vital interests of Canada and Canadians.

The Inuit look to the so-called advanced technological urban civilization in southern Canada and the United States with both fear and compassion. We see a society, in particular in the United States, virtually out of control - a society devastatingly destructive and polluting in respect to the natural environment, greedily over-consumptive, and with almost unmitigated materialistic values. We believe the Inuit have a great deal to contribute to Canadian society. The Inuit wish to participate in the development of a Canada which properly considers 'development' within a much broader context and one which includes Inuit values. The Inuit are not prepared to stand quietly on the sidelines and passively accept the destruction of their environment and identity, and the loss of what may well be the last opportunity for a better and different Canada.

Mr. Prime Minister, we call upon you to act now in respect to our request in this submission. Thank you.

Tagak E.C. Curley
President,
Inuit Tapirisat of Canada