



Commissioner's Address

*At the Opening of the Second Session of the Fourth
Legislative Assembly of Nunavut*

Delivered by:

**THE HONOURABLE EDNA ELIAS
COMMISSIONER OF NUNAVUT**

March 20, 2014

Elders, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, and honoured guests, I am pleased to welcome you and now declare open the second session of the fourth Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

It is an honour to serve Nunavummiut and it is with great pleasure that I am here before you to deliver the first Commissioner's address of this Assembly and our new government.

As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the creation of Nunavut, we take pride in our young, dynamic territory that is rich in culture and history. With confidence, we are moving forward with the knowledge that Nunavut is on the edge of change. However, we are acutely aware that pressing challenges still remain.

While we respect the achievements of previous Assemblies and continue to build on their accomplishments, we are mindful that our needs must be addressed in the immediate and long-term.

We are in a unique position; one that allows us to use what we have learned and face a new reality that instills positive change and reflects our transforming social and economic landscape.

We continue to be guided by Inuit societal values as we progress together towards a brighter future.

Together, the Assembly comes to this task with optimism: A willingness to face Nunavut's challenges directly; a commitment to take bold, decisive action that leads to real and visible progress; and a one that speaks to all the communities we represent through a healthy and realistic debate.

There is a significant milestone on our land. The restriction on the *Alienation of Municipal Lands* is set to expire next year. It means Nunavummiut are in a position to determine, by referendum, its outcome for the future.

Our government is committed to priorities that are focused and enable us to step forward together. Sivumut Abluqta, our mandate, endeavors to make Nunavut a better place for our children, grandchildren and all Nunavummiut.

During the second session of the fourth assembly, the government is tabling the *Northern Employee Benefits Services Pension Plan Act*. This act seeks to provide the public sector and non-profit employees with increased financial security in their retirement.

The government is also focused on creating community-based crime prevention initiatives that better reflect the challenges and needs in each of our communities.

We are considering legislation that strengthens a law enforcement officer's ability to seize property and proceeds believed to be a result of unlawful activities.

We are making progress in effectively implementing the *Official Languages Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*. We continue to centrally administer language funds and coordinate the implementation and monitoring of language obligations, policies, programs and services by departments and public agencies, in accordance with the *Uqausivut Plan* in 2014-2015.

Moving forward, we re-assure our commitment in this mandate to deliver programs and services in a sensible and effective manner that is effective, efficient and economical.

We seek to strengthen our governance structures and review government programs to determine what works well, what needs improvement, and what should be discontinued in order to focus our limited resources and enable success.

We must ensure funds provided to organizations, communities and individuals adhere to better accountability practices that achieve the outcomes this government expects from its investment.

Good governance also means we must continue to improve the fair and transparent practices used for public service staffing and career advancement.

Our government has made significant progress in developing a public service workforce strategy, which aims to build and support a public service that is representative of Nunavut's population and is inclusive of our commitments to *Article 23* of the NLCA.

Providing opportunities for Nunavummiut to enter and advance in government roles supports a stronger and sustainable public service.

Advancement includes continued investment in the education and development of our current and potential public servants, with an emphasis on increasing Inuit employment in professional and leadership roles throughout the public service.

It is inspiring to see that education is pivotal to this Assembly and key to our government's mandate. I look forward to this Assembly's review of the *Education Act*.

Throughout Canada and the globe, there is a strong relationship between education and its effects on increasing economic prosperity. It is the fundamental to equipping individuals with better access to opportunities in Nunavut's emerging economy.

With one of the fastest growing and youngest populations in Canada, our government believes in making them our priority. It is critical that we provide the best possible supports in order to improve and sustain

success. This includes supporting and encouraging studies through to post-secondary, technical and vocational studies.

We support the implementation of effective education measures that make a difference by taking the necessary steps to address educational achievement at all levels.

In the coming days, enhancements to our education system are being announced. These changes include adjustments to graduation requirements and introducing consistency in school curriculum that is relevant to our student's learning experiences.

Our government is introducing an assessment framework to gather measurable data. This framework identifies how students are progressing and acquiring knowledge and skills, and the extent of their understanding of the school curriculum.

There is significant commitment to increasing parent, family and district education authority engagement. This more active role can only encourage students to excel in school.

We support continued development of Inuktitut curriculum materials for basic adult education, and the participation of Elders in community learning centre programs.

Given the forthcoming growth in Nunavut's construction and resource sectors, we are committed to the advancement of the trades training.

There is no single individual or entity responsible to ensure a student's graduation from elementary to high school through to post secondary. It is a culmination of many involved from educators, parents, families, communities, partners and multiple levels of government.

We know that education is the single most-effective way to improve lives. This foundation is essential to developing a population that is self-reliant, better educated and fosters the development of more prosperous communities. It is an investment in our future.

Our government believes in strong communities – communities that are made up of healthy families and individuals that are equipped with the skills and resources to actively contribute to this territory.

In an effort to explore factors that contribute to increased self-reliance, our government has committed to assess barriers to becoming less dependent on income assistance.

Our government recognizes that individuals and families often face multiple barriers in moving forward toward independence. These challenges may include the struggle with mental illness, addictions, domestic violence and chronic disease.

There is growing momentum for community-focused solutions that employ holistic, traditional and contemporary approaches to achieving wellness.

The government is working to ensure clinical expertise and facilities are accessible to Nunavummiut.

There has been a tremendous amount of commitment and work to support the *Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan*. This effort could not have been accomplished without our partners, Nunavut Tunngavik, Embrace Life Council, the RCMP and the multiple government departments involved in seeing the action plan through.

Greater effort is needed to combat the rate of suicide that stands before us. The current suicide prevention action plan was due to expire this year. Through our valued partnerships, we have all committed to extend the plan.

It is through partnerships like this that we come together to establish alliances. The Nunavut Food Security Coalition is another good example. This coalition involves representatives across multiple government departments, Nunavut Tunngavik and regional Inuit organizations, various non-government and non-profit entities, and the private sector.

The coalition is introducing the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and 2013-2016 Action Plan*, which our government intends to support.

Food security includes the promotion of community-focused solutions to enhance access to nutritious foods. It is essential for our government to continue advocating for adequate policy and legislative measures that support this access at affordable prices.

We are confronted with meeting the demands of growing communities. With that onerous task, we persist in our efforts to advocate for long-term financing that meets the critical needs in developing housing and other vital infrastructure.

This is a task that goes beyond this government and it is only through essential partnership that we are able to mobilize our domestic resources and capitalize on the much-needed and continued investments.

In the 2014 federal budget, Canada dedicated \$419 million over 10 years to Nunavut through the *Building Canada Fund*. This investment is significant. We look forward to working with our federal partners and support investments that are applied to our areas of need.

Sivumut Abluqta will guide the renewal of the economic development initiatives.

We continue a cooperative relationship with our sister territories in the advancement of a *Northern Minerals Workforce Development Strategy*.

This government also believes in strong foundations in business and resource development that require reliable regulatory structures.

Employers in all sectors continue to rely on skilled labour from outside the territory. Our education and training programs need to work with the private sector and other partners to build a resident workforce that benefits and meets the needs of our growing economy.

This government is working towards renewing the *Labour Market Agreement* with the Government of Canada. It is an agreement that must ensure more Nunavummiut are able to receive funding and other supports for education and training to enter the workforce.

It would see the introduction of the *Canada-Nunavut Job Grant*, to assist Nunavut employers seeking to further train and develop their employees.

We recognize the critical role that harvesting plays in relation to our economy and creating more self-reliance. We require a dependable wildlife management system that supports this sector. It is an essential revenue source to our communities and we need to ensure the traditional harvest continues.

We are committed to reviewing and realigning our *Harvester Support and Fur programs*.

Our communities are diverse and geographically isolated. Each and every community has distinct needs and possesses unique qualities. Nunavut's success is proven in our ability to adapt and develop solutions that build on our strengths.

More importantly, government cannot achieve its vision alone. We need partners that understand the unique challenges of our majestic landscape. We want to see our culture flourish and see our communities grow in a healthy and sustainable way.

Let's step forward together for a better Nunavut.

Thank you.