



Commissioner's Address

*At the Opening of the Third Session of the
Third Legislative Assembly of Nunavut*

Delivered by:

**THE HONOURABLE EDNA EKHIVALAK ELIAS
COMMISSIONER OF NUNAVUT**

February 28, 2011

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, Elders, Premier, and honoured guests. I am very pleased today to welcome you to the Third Session of the Third Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

On April 1, 2009, our entire territory celebrated the 10 years since Nunavut came into existence. The last Commissioner's Address was delivered on April 1, 2009 and this Government joined by this Assembly is, and has been, dedicated to the commitments made in that speech to:

- continue to focus on existing priorities,
- conduct the Report Card review,
- reinforce the use of Inuit societal values as guiding principles of the government, and
- implement new initiatives to strive for the vision under *Tamapta: Building our Future Together*.

At the same time the Government of Nunavut developed the *Tamapta* vision for 2030. That vision was based on who we are, what we have accomplished and our dedication to do what it takes during the next 20 years to achieve that vision. A dedication we hope will be shared by future governments.

In a month from now, we will have completed two of those twenty years. Progress has been made, challenges have been met head-on, and the Government of Nunavut, led by its Premier, has a clear roadmap for the next two years.

The Government's commitment to *Tamapta's* vision remains as strong today as it was two years ago. Guided by Inuit values and culture, along with dedication, focus and hard work, by the year 2030, Nunavummiut will have a much better standard of living, especially for those most in need. Individuals and families will be active, healthy, and happy. Communities will be self-reliant, with less dependence on government.

It is through the achievement of this vision that Nunavut will be recognized for our unique culture, our ability to help one another, and by our contributions to Canada and the world.

Nunavut is truly 'our land' and our land is part of Canada. We are committed to the Canadian federation. It is important that Nunavummiut and this territorial government work side by side with the Canadian Government on sovereignty issues to maintain our proud place as Canada's most northern territory.

The government, with input from all Members of this Assembly, used the feedback from Nunavummiut in the Qanukkanniq Report Card to develop the *Tamapta Action Plan* in December 2009. The Action Plan outlines the steps to be taken to move towards achieving our vision. Since then progress has been made in many areas.

- Nunavummiut earning minimum wage saw an increase in their pay cheques starting January 1, 2011 when minimum wage jumped 10 per cent from \$10 to \$11 an

hour – the highest in Canada. A first step towards poverty reduction.

- More than 100 Elders have had someone to talk to when they faced challenges, threats or problems since the launch of the Elder's Support Phone Line in 2009.
- 230 Nunavummiut have taken part in suicide intervention training delivered by Nunavummiut through Uqaqatigiilluk, an important first step on the road to providing in-territory mental health services.
- The launch of the Social Services Review last fall was truly an exercise in effecting change starting at the community level. Partnering with Elders, Inuit organizations and professionals, this government engaged a broad sector of Nunavummiut in the review of the *Child and Family Services Act*. We will see the outcome of that review at the spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

- During the past two years, we have witnessed 21 Nunavummiut receiving their Masters of Education degree and 10 graduating from the Inuit Maternity Care Program. The Nunavut Trade School and the Piqqusilirivvik Cultural Learning Facility will provide amazing opportunities not previously available in our territory.
- We have seen substantial increases to the number of turbot that commercial fishing boats can fish, successfully fought an attempt to put polar bears on the endangered species list, and are continuing to actively support the sealing industry which is so important to Nunavut.
- The Inuit Language Standardization Symposium hosted by the Minister of Languages through Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit has provided the foundation for the ongoing work of individuals, government, Inuit organizations and businesses to implement our legislation to protect the Inuit Language.

- Remaining dedicated to completing the previous government's projects and maintaining a focus on care closer to home, this government has witnessed the opening of Nunavut's first women's corrections facility, providing in-territory services, a new medical boarding home in Iqaluit, continuing care centres in Gjoa Haven and Igloolik, and operational health centres in Rankin Inlet and Pangnirtung.
- Nunavut has joined the Climate Change Registry and is working on detailed action plans to implement a Climate Change Adaptation Plan.
- We have RCMP members posted to our communities for four years at a time, not two, a new Arctic Bay airport, Integrated Community Sustainability Plans, and a Nunavut arts & crafts brand that is gaining recognition worldwide.

The Government of Nunavut cannot and did not make this progress alone. Nunavummiut, in all of our communities, in all sectors, of every gender and of every age, were

instrumental in making these successes achievable within our limited financial resources. Our people are our biggest strength and our most important asset.

All of this government's priorities have been deliberately chosen to build a foundation for the future of Nunavut; a future that is built on solid ground.

What is the source of this solid ground? Our people. It is the 33,000 resilient Nunavummiut who hold our shared future in their hands.

Our land, while unforgiving, is rich in natural resources, particularly in minerals and petroleum. Currently it is estimated that the undiscovered resources in Nunavut equal 25 per cent of Canada's crude oil resources and 34 percent of Canada's natural gas resources.

Currently, the federal government controls the revenue generated from developed Crown lands in Nunavut. Devolution of authority for land management from the federal government to the territorial government is

essential if Nunavummiut are to be truly self-reliant and the beneficiaries of future economic growth of mining and exploration in Nunavut.

It is important for the government to balance the economic benefits of mining with the health and safety of our people, land and environment. With uranium being one area of current mining focus, the government will be developing its position on uranium once it hears what Nunavummiut have to say on the issue during public forums starting next month.

Increased number of consultation is just one of the ways that this government has improved its dialogue with Nunavummiut. The new Government of Nunavut website was launched last fall and has already been visited over 40,000 times by people looking for current and accurate information about government services and staff. Another significant step forward in communication is the establishment of the Government Liaison program. Government Liaison Officers will be in every community and will be the link for information not only to Nunavummiut but also from Nunavummiut.

This government has a clear roadmap for how we will support Nunavummiut's efforts over the coming years. This government will put special focus on Children and Youth, Poverty Reduction, Community Self-Reliance, Housing, and Capital Projects as its highest priorities from now until 2013.

Nunavummiut are graduating from post-secondary programs in numbers unheard of a few short years ago. Our children and youth need a good start in life and we must therefore focus on early childhood development and daycare. We must all continue to encourage students to attend school daily, to engage in learning, to graduate from high school and to strive for higher education.

Nunavut's governments, organizations and private businesses need the skills, knowledge and commitment of today's youth to run our territory in the future. Strive to succeed, to become independent from your parents, to be a contributing member of your community – whether that be as an artist, government executive, counselor, technician, store clerk, doctor, or hunter who regularly fills the community

freezer. Do what you can to make Nunavut strong and government will ensure that opportunities to train and learn remain available for Nunavummiut of all ages.

More Nunavummiut are better able to support not only their immediate family, but contribute to the wealth of their communities as well. This government will partner with our communities to reduce poverty for those who have difficulty meeting their basic needs. The answers to reducing poverty will be found through true public engagement, which involves all stakeholders participating in decisions and actions. There are many aspects of poverty, but there is one that can be addressed without delay -- food insecurity.

One-third of Nunavut households face problems with food quantity and quality. We will help communities to respond to this problem by supporting the distribution of country food, launching a program to help municipalities upgrade, repair or replace their community freezers, and encouraging hunters to fill them for the common good.

Nunavummiut are being empowered to shape the future of Nunavut by being asked for input and participate in many decisions on issues being considered by this government. This empowerment will lead communities and Nunavummiut in becoming more self-reliant. This government will invest in communities to increase their self-reliance. Nunavut will be closer to its vision if its communities are able to rely on their own resources. Through training, and increased funding for mobile equipment and other infrastructure, each community will grow stronger. This in turn makes a stronger Nunavut.

As land and building supplies become available more Nunavummiut are becoming homeowners, while others are managing to rent housing that is appropriate to their family size. However, there are many who are working hard to meet other basic needs and will require assistance with housing over the coming years, especially as our young population grows and the pressures on housing threaten to multiply. The Housing Survey, completed last summer, provides a critical planning tool in our pursuit of additional housing resources. This government is committed to making sure that the Nunavut Housing Corporation is equipped to

complete the construction of the public housing units already committed. Over the long term, we are dedicated to addressing overcrowding and hidden homelessness in Nunavut.

Nunavummiut are contributing to the construction of our infrastructure on a daily basis, through construction projects across our territory. This government will bring clear focus to our large capital projects, such as airports, so that we can select projects that offer the greatest potential to build Nunavut's economy, and finance these projects in cooperation with the federal government and the private sector, while taking into consideration our limited resources.

These five objectives centre entirely on the development of Nunavummiut. Our people wish to succeed in our modern world without losing our culture and traditions. Already, there are many highly successful Nunavummiut. We will focus our finite resources and endless abilities on the challenge of preparing more Nunavummiut to excel as the economy grows.

By focusing on these objectives, we make their attainment ever more possible and our advancement toward our *Tamapta* vision more significant.

Members of the Third Legislative Assembly, all of you have a role to play in helping Nunavummiut succeed. Tomorrow you will be invited by the Minister of Finance to consider his budgetary proposals to allocate resources among government departments in support of these objectives and the public agenda. You will recognize in his budget, despite the fiscal pressures this government faces, that the priorities of this government are reflected in the financial plans and in the detailed work plans of the various departments and agencies.

There is no denying that the current fiscal situation is tight, to the point where the Minister of Finance will need to introduce a deficit budget to ensure that programs and services can continue to be delivered. This will require an even closer look at the government's structure and processes, to ensure that everything is streamlined for best efficiency and effectiveness. By moving forward with necessary changes

over the coming year, the government will improve its efficiency and reduce the likelihood of deficit in future years.

Much of the government's work over the past year has been focused on further refining its policies, processes and plans. The next two years will see the implementation of this work.

For example, we eagerly await the results of the Social Services Review, which will no doubt lead to much improvement in the provision of child protection services and the *Child and Family Services Act*.

The Government of Nunavut has plans to develop a Public Health Act, a Public Service Act, and legislation to create a Child and Youth Representative over the coming years.

All Members of this Assembly will have a significant role to play in reviewing these legislative initiatives in detail over the coming years, to ensure they meet the needs of our territory and our people.

As Commissioner, it is my hope that the next two years will see great activity at every level and by every person in reaching the *Tamapta* vision. Neither Nunavut nor the *Tamapta* mandate is primarily about government. It is about the collective hopes of Nunavummiut and a vision for our territory and its people in the year 2030.

Government will play a leading role, but our hope for Nunavut's vibrant future rests with the success that will come when each person has the opportunity and desire to pursue their dreams. Believe in Nunavut, believe in yourselves.

I now declare open the Third Session of the Third Legislative Assembly. I invite everyone present today to join me for a reception in the lobby of the Assembly.