

**Canada Russia Dialogue**  
**Canadian and Russian Inuit: Cultural Connections and Foundations for Cooperation**  
**April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**9:00 EST / 16:00 Moscow**  
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First, I'd like to say nakurmiik, thank you, to the organizers for the invitation to participate in this discussion today – to thrive in a rapidly changing Arctic it will require Russian and Canadian cooperation on many fronts from infrastructure, shipping, and wildlife harvesting, to supporting our unique cultural landscape and languages.

My name is Lisa Koperqualuk. I am from Puvirnituk, Nunavik in Northern Quebec. I am the Vice President - International Affairs for ICC Canada.

Today I will share with you some thoughts I have about the Arctic and how our shared cultural connections have and can continue to be foundations for increased cooperation between our countries. I believe that co-operation on all levels – economic, environmental security, sovereignty – can be created through the lens of social equity. We must move towards decision making that envisions a healthy future for our families and our communities. By enhancing cooperation, encouraging dialogue and meaningful partnerships, we will be able to build equity in our communities, civil society, industry, governments, and, of course, amongst Indigenous peoples.

My Inuit family lives in and occupy over 40% of the Arctic coast from Chukotka all the way to the west towards Greenland. Although the physical distance between Canada and Russia shores is vast - Inuit transcend this distance, political borders and unite the Arctic through a shared language and culture.

I will speak to five areas of Canada and Russia cooperation that during the next 2 years as Russia chairs the Arctic Council can build on Canada and Russia's shared vision and lead to stronger relations and a better future for Inuit and all peoples of the Arctic region.

I will leave you with a few concrete recommendations for action.

In 1977 the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) was founded and now represents the 180,000 Inuit in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka.

ICC's objectives are to develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and, seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of circumpolar regions.

Our principal objective is to unite the Inuit voice.

Much of our efforts are through the Arctic Council and we are looking forward to working with the Russian Chairmanship. We will work with ICC Chukotka to be full partners in achieving Russia's four goals of engaging Arctic inhabitants including the indigenous peoples; working towards environmental protection, social and economic growth and further strengthening the Arctic Council as a key framework of international Arctic cooperation. These goals mirror the 2018 ICC Utqiagvik Declaration which guides ICC's work in promoting our rights and interests on an international level.

It is said that Russia's day starts in Chukotka, an expression that speaks to the importance of the place of Chukotka in the Russian Arctic

ICC has had decades of Canada – Russia cooperation at the ministerial level and Canadian Institution Building for Northern Russian Indigenous Peoples (INRIP). This was a unique project supported and

managed by ICC Canada, the Canadian Government, ICC Chukotka and the Russian Government. Also, in 2001 – twenty years ago – the Government of Chukotka Autonomous Region, the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, and the ICC signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to strengthen cooperation on the issues related to the development of indigenous peoples.

These constructive relationships are worth working towards as they build trust for larger co-operative relations between Canada and Russia - through creative partnerships with indigenous peoples we can achieve trust, equity and respect. ICC is interested in building co-operation standards that build on these successful partnerships, through new projects that strengthen Inuit in the circumpolar world we can maintain these important ties between our countries – build more – we are stronger together.

To fulfill ICC's goal of equality for Inuit in governance and access to resources, and fulfill the pillars of the Russian Chairmanship, equal participation of all Inuit in Arctic Council activities is a goal worth pursuing.

**Recommendation 1:** Support ICC Chukotka to participate in the Russian Chairmanship and as a full member of the ICC family and create a sustained dialogue on issues of mutual concern.

Since 1977, ICC's vision was to look beyond our borders to capitals that make the decisions that impact Inuit Nunaat – my home... we have worked within the United Nations and other international fora to advance the human rights of Inuit as well as many other issues. We are approaching the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032). The language and culture we share – is evidenced when Chukotkan Inuit speak the same dialect as their Alaska cousins and Canadian Inuit speak with Greenlandic Inuit – language binds our countries.

**Recommendation 2:** During the Russian Chairmanship support the launch of the UN Decade on Indigenous languages and for Canada and Russia to sustain this support throughout the decade.

Inuit have always held firm to the belief that the Arctic should be a zone of peace as stated in the 1983 Inuit Arctic Policy. Peace and security and the rule of law in the Arctic is foundational to protect Inuit and all Indigenous peoples – to create safe communities where the expression of unique cultural values is protected. These cultural values extend to the rights of Inuit to harvest our wildlife.

The cooperation between Russia and the United States, Canada and Greenland is evidenced by strong cross-border cooperation and collaboration in weather forecasting, fisheries and in forums such as the International Whaling Commission, the foundation for the protection of our right to harvest bowhead whales is supported. Other agreements exist that protect the wildlife resources and our cultural right to food security.

There is also the landmark international treaty on the prevention of unregulated fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, which recognizes the need for cooperation in ecosystem management, there are no borders for the need to safeguard the marine ecosystem.

Inuit are a part of a globalizing world – and the Arctic is an important geopolitical region. Our communities are often asked to contribute Indigenous knowledge to inform research, policy, and decision making in the Arctic and beyond. Our Inuit knowledge is more than a base of information, it is a 'way of knowing' and ensures a holistic view of the complex interconnectedness of environment, flora, fauna, and people of the Arctic. Indigenous knowledge is a *way of life*. It is how we operate in the world. It is how we relate to our environment and to one another. It is rooted in our culture and language.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase collaboration for the acquisition of Arctic knowledge through science, and Indigenous knowledge to inform decision making on issues of shared concern.

One common foundation between Canada, Russia and Inuit is as noted earlier we use and occupy vast stretches of the Arctic coastline, as such are all maritime peoples, dependent upon the ocean and sea ice. We know shipping is increasing in the Arctic and as such our voices must be heard and we must be at the tables where decisions on Arctic waters are made. Therefore 5 years ago Inuit began a process to gain

consultative status to the International Maritime Organization, the IMO, the penultimate body for shipping decision making.

Our intricate knowledge, awareness, and experience within the Arctic and the views of our people are all important elements of our contribution to implementing UNCLOS and the Polar Code through the IMO. CC hopes to bring to the IMO: the Arctic, Inuit Knowledge - as well as Inuit cultural perspectives, which highlight our dependence on shipping – shipping is critical infrastructure for Inuit. We believe that our connection to the Arctic marine environment will be a contribution to the IMO in a constructive, balanced fashion that will ultimately benefit the IMO and the global shipping community.

**Recommendation 4:** Russia and Canada to support ICC’s application for consultative status to the IMO.

Of course, one cannot talk about the Arctic without speaking about climate change.

In 2020, the IPCC’s Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere reminded us that the Arctic is warming faster than any other region in the world. At this point, the multi-faceted impacts of climate change on the Arctic, and on Arctic Indigenous Peoples, are well known. Inuit have been observing and documenting the changes in the Arctic for over 50 years – even before scientists began to study the phenomena.

The impact of climate change on literally every aspect of our lives has been *extensively* documented over the past decades. It is also widely known that our intimate and inextricable relationship with our Nuna, our land, is both the cause for the tremendous impacts we experience due to environmental change AND the source of our resilience and ability to adapt and thrive.

We look forward to engaging in a meaningful way at COP 26 in Glasgow.

**Recommendation 5:** Canada and Russia support joint efforts at COP 26 to collaborate an engaging Inuit youth and to use our combined innovation to explore joint climate resilient infrastructure projects.

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There is much to discuss but for now I’ll leave you with those thoughts and further conversations!