

Inuit simply wish for the same foundation to achieve prosperity that are available to most other Canadians, and to not have to sacrifice our culture and language in the process of achieving equity. © Scott Doubt

There is no straight path to reconciliation



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Canada’s growing interest in reconciliation has fostered an unprecedented national dialogue about not only improving the lives of Indigenous peoples and the communities in which we live, but also how to build respect today in the same institutions that have staggeringly complex histories of disrespect. This dialogue presents an opportunity to help Canadians understand that a more respectful relationship between Inuit and our fellow citizens and governments is essential for any hope at achieving a country in which Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples live in prosperity and peace.

I hope that Canadians can accept that the longstanding social inequities too many of our people experience are not accidents of history or byproducts of misinformation. Too many Inuit go hungry, die from tuberculosis, lack basic government services, and experience unnecessary social suffering because our fellow citizens and the governments they elect have been unwilling to invest equitably in Inuit Nunangat. Our health and socio-economic gaps are products of systems designed to produce these results. We simply wish for the same foundation to achieve prosperity that are available to most other Canadians, and not have to sacrifice our culture and language in the process of achieving equity.

Inuit are taking advantage of the current political climate and platform we have to promote understanding of the links between widespread attitudes toward Inuit and policies that cause undue harm to our people and communities. The two are linked in ways that may not be obvious at first glance yet have profound implications for the advancement of our Inuit policy agenda. This agenda includes securing basic supports for health and prosperity, such as access to



housing, food security, and health services and supports.

Just as global greenhouse gas emissions produced thousands of kilometres away affect our Inuit Nunangat climate profoundly, so too do the prevailing negative attitudes of our fellow citizens towards Indigenous peoples affect our ability to achieve social equity. If Canadians are largely ignorant of the role founding fathers like Sir John A. McDonald actively played in the creation of residential schools, then an opportunity for recalibration of our history that then informs our current decision making is lost. If Canadians use outdated and widely accepted derogatory monikers affiliated with our people and claim that doing so is harmless, then we are left to conclude that respect for Inuit is secondary to the whims of Canadian society and how it chooses to name, describe, and control us.

Unfortunately, we often dissuade each other from focusing on the broader attitudes and perceptions that mold our political reality. The argument usually goes like this: As long as our rates of overcrowding are higher than the Canadian average, then we shouldn’t spend time talking about discrimination. If we have low high school graduation rates, then we cannot invest any efforts in championing post-secondary education. Or more commonly, if we have such

broad and longstanding social inequity, then Inuit should not invest any time advocating for changing sports team names or buildings named after Canada’s founding fathers.

Make no mistake, the attitudes that Canadians have towards us contribute to the maintenance of the status quo in areas such as health, housing, and education. Consider for example that the interrelated challenges too many of our people face contribute to a lifespan for Inuit that is 10 years lower than for Canadians as a whole, on par with countries like Iraq and Mongolia.

Why is this? In no small part it is because there is still a massive gap between what Canada is willing to do in this time of reconciliation and what is necessary to stop the discrimination, ignorance, and racism that is inherent in the way our populations are served in this country.

It is rare that the path is straight or there is a call and response that is straightforward and rational. I know we are on a new path. I am convinced the only way to better Inuit society is through the very hearts and minds of how Canadians think and act toward us, not just settling for Canadians to step aside and let funding flow or services be delivered. **ASB**

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Canadian Inuit are prospering through unity and self-determination