

Background

The creation of Nunavut in 1999 changed the linguistic map of the Arctic. Inuit language speakers are the largest language group in Nunavut.

Since the tabling of the proposed language bills in March, the Language Legislation Steering Committee, including Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the Office of the Languages Commissioner held five roundtables with participation from most Nunavut communities. A variety of departments and officials representing the government of Canada who had previously been engaged were also re-engaged during this period.

The feedback received at these consultations, provided a helpful basis for their adjustment, to insure that the bills introduced reflect and respond appropriately to the linguistic needs of Nunavummiut.

The Languages Commissioner will have new powers to work with organizations to find solutions to any difficulties that arise in their implementation of new Language requirements, as is consistent with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. If these reasonable measures do not resolve compliance problems,

- the Languages Commissioner is provided with a variety of new enforcement tools, and
- a person or organization can also apply to the Nunavut Court of Justice. In this civil application, the Court can respond to any compliance problems that are proved by imposing ANY remedy that it considers to be appropriate and just.

The legislation will create the Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit. This organization will bring together the most knowledgeable individuals available to develop new Inuit Language terminology, monitor public usage, and document and promote traditional words. After an initial establishment period, it will operate as a fully independent body that is able to make authoritative decisions at arm's-length from the government.

The federal government has an ongoing role to play with respect to this legislation and the Language issues raised by the establishment of Nunavut in 1999.

- Cooperation between the federal and territorial governments in the area of language began in 1984 with the passage of the first Northwest Territories *Official Languages Act*;
- The governments of Nunavut and Canada have both affirmed the importance of cooperation in support of the Inuit Language and Francophone communities in Nunavut, but continue to work under the same terms as first inherited in 1999;
- In the context of negotiations regarding the future implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, Mr. Thomas Berger Q.C., conciliator, declared that Nunavut now faces a “moment of change, a moment of crisis,” that is inextricably connected to the Inuit language. Berger linked the linguistic circumstances to be addressed through Land Claim implementation in Nunavut today, to the situation faced by Quebecois during the late 1960's and early 1970's.
- Before the Official Languages Bill can come into force s. 38 of the *Nunavut Act*, requires the “*concurrence of Parliament by ... resolution*”. This requirement involves a federal “concurrence motion” that is publicly debated and passed by the federal Parliament, (House of Commons and Senate).