



News Release

EU Urged to Vote Against Seal Product Ban, Nunavut

Tromsø, Norway (April 29, 2009) – Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak continues to urge European Union (EU) parliamentarians to vote against the proposed seal product ban. In Tromsø, Norway for the Sixth Ministerial Arctic Council meeting this week, Premier Aariak spoke about the implications of their vote on Inuit and Nunavummiut.

Premier Aariak called on the Europeans to avoid cultural prejudice. “Inuit see this ban as something based on misunderstanding. The animal rights extremists have distributed propaganda and are fundraising here at the expense of Nunavummiut and have misinformed and prejudiced so many Europeans,” she said. “Where Europeans slaughter their domestic animals in enclosed buildings, they seem upset that our harvesting is done in the open, out on the ice or in the water.”

Harvesting seals is traditional for Inuit and a fundamental aspect of their culture. It is a right protected by the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement. It is also traditional for them to trade seal skins that are not required for use within a family or community -with other Inuit communities and non-Inuit merchants.

Premier Aariak noted that the European Commission’s Communication on the Arctic Region last November proposed to conduct dialogues with indigenous communities engaged in hunting seals. “There has been no dialogue with the communities of Nunavut on this undertaken by the Commission. On behalf of our communities, we have had to try to engage the EU directly and through the federal government.”

The Premier added that “to use the words from the Commission’s policy, we agree that they should not adversely affect the fundamental economic and social interests of indigenous communities traditionally engaged in the hunting of seals”

“For Inuit, the truth remains that harvesting seals will continue whatever the vote by the EU,” Premier Aariak confirmed. “The impacts for our people and communities are the loss of a market and the loss of a source of income, and the stigma that our cultural traditions are subject to a ban. I want to report that providing Inuit with an exemption from the ban does not resolve the issue –the ban kills the market for sealskins and impacts all harvesters.”

Nunavut has more than ten thousand seal skin pelts that were unsold from this year and last year after the EU announced the proposed ban.

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