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qajuqturvik community food centre  
centre communautaire d'alimentation qajuqturvik  
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# SUBMISSION TO CANADA'S FOURTH UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (PRE-SESSION) 2023

## ABOUT QAJUQTURVIK COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre (QCFC) is located in Iqaluit, Nunavut, one of the four Canadian regions that make up Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homelands) in Canada. Qajuqturvik provides programming in food access, skills and training, and advocacy. We strive to strengthen health, belonging and food sovereignty using the power of tradition and community. We have a first-hand understanding of food security in Nunavut and the various factors that affect our unique food system.

## FOOD INSECURITY AND WEAKENED FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN INUIT NUNANGAT

Food insecurity, defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, among Inuit in Canada is one of the longest lasting public health emergencies in Canadian history.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2019 report, 77.6% of adult Inuit in Nunavut are reported to be food insecure.<sup>2</sup> The average weekly cost to feed a family of four in Nunavut, even after subsidies, exceeds \$400 CAD, which is two to three times the national average, making it the most expensive in Canada.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Inuit in Canada face the highest documented prevalence of food insecurity among an Indigenous population in a developed nation.<sup>4</sup>

Before COVID, food insecurity affected 12.7% of the Canadian population—or 1 in 8 Canadians.<sup>5</sup> Since the pandemic, food insecurity has increased by 39% and now affects 1 in 7 Canadians.<sup>6</sup> This problem disproportionately impacts Northern communities: the rate of food

<sup>1</sup> National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, p.3-4.

[https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK\\_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Qikiqtani Inuit Association (2019), *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*, p. 2.

<https://www.qia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Food-Sovereignty-and-Harvesting.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, p.17.

[https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK\\_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Qikiqtani Inuit Association (2019), *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*, p. 2.

<https://www.qia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Food-Sovereignty-and-Harvesting.pdf> ; The scope of this strategy kit will focus on policy changes tailored for Nunavut, however it's hoped that the material can be adapted to other regions in Inuit Nunangat in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Tarasuk V., and Mitchell, A. (2020). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017–18*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. (2020, May). *Food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00039-eng.htm>



insecurity pre-pandemic in the territories ranged from 16.9% in the Yukon to 57% in Nunavut.<sup>7</sup> The high rates of food insecurity in Northern communities are, in part, due to the combination of lower incomes and a higher cost of living, including food prices. For example, in Nunavik, the lowest income Inuit households spend more than 70% of their income on food and housing, even with the benefit of several cost-of-living measures that do not exist in other Inuit regions.<sup>8</sup>

It is well documented that food insecurity has deleterious physical and mental health effects. People who are food insecure are more likely to suffer from a number of chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension.<sup>9</sup> Food insecurity also leads to increased instances of depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and suicidal ideation, and children who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience mental-health challenges as adults.<sup>10</sup>

A 2020 report released by Community Food Centres Canada found the effects of food insecurity permeate all aspects of people's lives. Of the nearly 600 people living with food insecurity surveyed:

- 81% said food insecurity takes a toll on their physical health;
- 79% said it takes a toll on their mental health;
- 64% said it erodes relationships with family and friends;
- 59% said it negatively impacts their children;
- 58% said it socially isolates them;
- 57% said it makes it harder to find and keep a job;
- 53% said it makes it harder to move their lives forward; and
- 46% said it limits their ability to celebrate their culture.<sup>11</sup>

On top of these statistics, food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat has been linked to high rates of suicide, which is 9 times higher among Inuit than the national average.<sup>12</sup> This alarmingly high rate of suicide rose in direct correlation with the economic collapse that the sealskin industry

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<sup>7</sup>Tarasuk V., and Mitchell, A. (2020). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017–18*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

<sup>8</sup> National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

[https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK\\_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). (2016). *The impact of food insecurity on health*. Retrieved from

<https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/health-impact-factsheet.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). (2018). *Food insecurity and mental health*. Retrieved from

<https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mental-health-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> McNicoll and Curtis (2020). *Beyond Hunger: the hidden impacts of food insecurity in Canada*.

Community Food Centres Canada. Retrieved from <https://beyondbunger.ca>

<sup>12</sup>Statistics Canada. (2019, June), *Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (2011-2016): Findings from the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort (CanCHEC)*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/99-011-x/99-011-x2019001-eng.htm>.

experienced when the European Economic Community banned sealskin and sealskin products in Europe in October 1983.<sup>13</sup>

These statistics underscore the severity of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat and the urgent need for effective interventions that are rooted in Inuit societal values and self-determination, this is because food insecurity is a symptom of a lack of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is the right to culturally appropriate food harvested through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. Inuit Tapariit Kanatami has described Inuit food sovereignty to be characterized as Inuit being able to freely define the policies shaping their food systems so that they reflect their food priorities and preferences.<sup>14</sup> As such, food sovereignty is a reflection of Inuit self-determination and agency. Food sovereignty in Inuit Nunangat can only be met when Inuit have control over their own food system.

In Inuit Nunangat, locally sourced food is called country food and the food producers are Inuit hunters and harvesters. Country food comes from the land and sea and includes arctic char, seal, muskox, caribou, whale, walrus, clams, berries - to name just a few. Country foods are extremely nutritious and widely preferred compared to store bought foods. Prior to colonization, Inuit moved with the seasons, ensuring that a steady source of country food was always available. Acting as environmental stewards and community leaders, hunters protected the land and waters to ensure the health and wellbeing of their communities. As our communities now face the highest levels of food insecurity in the country, hunters continue to be the front-line workers keeping people fed through the use of communal sharing networks.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLONIAL POLICIES IN INUIT NUNANGAT

It is essential to understand the historical context in which this crisis has developed in order to develop and support policy and programs that will have long-term, sustainable results. In our historical context, a series of federal policies worked together to remove Inuit from the land and disrupt the indigenous food systems in Inuit Nunangat, which fundamentally altered the Inuit way of life from the mid-1900s to the present. Prior to the Second World War, RCMP officers were the only year-round government representatives in Canada's North. In addition to law-enforcement duties, they kept official records of the Inuit population, reported yearly on conditions in traditional camps and delivered relief supplies when needed. They were also stationed in the north with the intent to assert Canadian sovereignty over the region.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>George W. Wenzel. *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Ecology, Economy and Ideology in the Canadian Arctic.* University of Toronto Press, 1991.

<sup>14</sup>National Inuit Food Security Working Group (2021), *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, p.4.

[https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK\\_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf)

<sup>15</sup>“Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975” About the Commission. p.20.



During the Second World War, American and Canadian military bases were established in the Qikiqtani region and interest in the natural resources of the North took root, which coincided with the forced relocation of Inuit from their traditional camps to living in settlements.<sup>16</sup> Among some of the promises made by the federal government to Inuit in exchange for relocation included housing, education and employment. This forced sedentarization was part of the same genocidal and assimilationist policies which underpinned the Canadian residential school system and ushered in the involvement of the Canadian Government in all aspects of Inuit life by replicating southern Canadian institutions in the North without consulting Inuit or taking into account the distinct requirements of the Northern environment.<sup>17</sup> Further, many of the government's initiatives were chronically underfunded and mismanaged.<sup>18</sup>

One of these initiatives was the systematic killing of Inuit sled dogs [*qimmiit*] conducted by the RCMP and other government officials during multiple waves over the course of the 1950 to 1975.<sup>19</sup> Over this 25 year period, Inuit went from living semi-nomadically in over a hundred small kinship groups, sustained by the land through hunting and gathering, to thirteen overcrowded government created settlements in the Qikiqtani region alone. The reduction of the number of *qimmiit* to almost zero in twenty years moved at the same pace as the growth of the *qallunaat* [non-Inuit] presence in the region.<sup>20</sup>

Without dog teams, Inuit hunters could no longer go out on the land, travel, hunt and feed their families; their livelihoods and cultural practices were severely undermined. As a result of these policies, Inuit were forced into settlements which disconnected them from the land and forced into the local wage economy. Suddenly, hunters had to purchase snowmobiles and gas if they wanted to hunt and feed their families. Prior to these colonial policies, prolonged periods of food scarcity among Inuit were extremely rare.

After petitioning the federal government to investigate the systematic killing of *qimmiit*, without success, and after the subsequent denial of the RCMP in a report on the matter, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association established the Qikiqtani Truth Commission as an independent body mandated to provide comprehensive analysis of the history of the Qikiqtani Inuit and government relations. The Qikiqtani Truth Commission and its recommendations are a result of the first Inuit-sponsored, Inuit-led truth commission and have documented this period of Canadian

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<sup>16</sup> "Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975" About the Commission. p.20.

<sup>17</sup> "Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975" About the Commission. p.21-22.

<sup>18</sup> "Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975" About the Commission. p.22.

<sup>19</sup> Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Qimmiliriniq: Inuit Sled Dogs in Qikiqtaaluk*, (Iqaluit, NU: Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Qimmiliriniq: Inuit Sled Dogs in Qikiqtaaluk*, (Iqaluit, NU: Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2014).



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history, however its recommendations have yet to be fully implemented by the federal government.<sup>21</sup>

## **IMPORTED FOODS VS COUNTRY FOOD**

Country food is a vital part of Inuit culture and diet, however the prevalence of country food in people's diets is decreasing. Today, hunting equipment is very expensive and many hunters have to subsidize their activities through participating in the wage economy. This limits the amount of time hunters can spend out on the land and the freedom to harvest when the weather and movements of animals are right for hunting. The reduced consumption of country food and the declining participation in hunting activities have detrimental effects on food security and cultural heritage. As a result there is less country food distributed through sharing networks and more people relying on store bought food.

Most perishable foods imported into Nunavut are eligible for a subsidy through the federal government's Nutrition North program. Northern retailers receive a subsidy meant to offset the transportation costs of eligible food and other essential items. However, this subsidy is not applied to country foods caught and distributed within Nunavut. In theory, the subsidies received by northern retailers are meant to be passed on to the consumer. However, in 2011, when Nutrition North was introduced, food insecurity rates in Nunavut increased by 6 percent and have continued to rise ever since. This could be attributed to the fact that most northern communities are monopolies, often having only one store operated by the NorthWest Company as a retailer, who are therefore able to set food prices indiscriminately which increases the risk and prevalence of price gouging. Further, the Nutrition North Subsidy program's current financial auditing procedure has no mechanism to ensure or verify that subsidy amounts are really passing through to the consumers.

Food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat is showing no signs of improvement, signaling that the status quo does not work. Neither food security nor food sovereignty will be reached by continuing to focus on costly imported food while ignoring the local food system. The path to achieving a food sovereign system has been researched, recorded, and delivered to the different levels of Canadian government by Inuit leadership in recent years. It has also been identified as a key step towards reconciliation.

## **PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS**

Previous recommendations have touched on the need to improve access to essential services to marginalized communities, including indigenous peoples, however the following recommendations have not been previously made at this forum.

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<sup>21</sup> "Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies 1950–1975" Acknowledgements by James Iglorite p.10

**RECOMMENDATION #1: CREATE AND ADEQUATELY FUND SALARIED POSITIONS FOR HUNTERS IN INUIT NUNANGAT**

Recognizing hunting as a paid profession is essential, as the work of hunters remains largely unpaid. Offering salaries for hunters will create economic opportunities within the harvesting sector, leading to economic growth and improved livelihoods in Inuit communities. By recognizing hunting as a paid profession, Canada can create economic opportunities, improve livelihoods, and foster culturally-relevant economic development, particularly in smaller, harvesting-centric communities. This approach would be particularly impactful in communities where alternative options for economic development are limited. This would be an act of reconciliation and an important step towards repairing the harm created by previous and ongoing colonial policies.

New policies that recognize Inuit hunters as essential should be developed and hunters should be paid fairly for the vital work that they provide. Ultimately, the key food producers in the most food insecure region in Canada should not have to live in poverty in order to provide their communities with food. These positions and accompanying policies should be developed in cooperation with regional Inuit organizations and other local governments.

**RECOMMENDATION #2: CREATE AND ADEQUATELY FUND TARGETED BASIC INCOME IN INUIT NUNANGAT**

Much like anywhere else in Canada, the issue of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat is fundamentally an issue of income disparity. The income gap between Inuit and non-Inuit in the region remains stark, with non-Inuit earning nearly four times the income of their Inuit counterparts. The government's continued reliance on a fragile charitable sector to provide essential needs such as shelter, mental health services, and food to a significant portion of the population underscores the pressing need for a sustainable solution.

Introducing a guaranteed annual livable income model in Inuit Nunangat would support individual autonomy, stimulate local economies, and reduce barriers to hunting and harvesting. In comparison to traditional social assistance models, basic income models have been shown to more effectively lift individuals permanently out of poverty. The success of similar programs like the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada Child Benefit have shown their positive impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable communities in Canada. Developed collaboratively with Inuit and adequately funded, a guaranteed basic income has the potential to significantly reduce poverty in Inuit Nunangat and dramatically increase quality of life.



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**RECOMMENDATION #3: DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE IN INUIT NUNANGAT**

Communities in Inuit Nunangat experience an infrastructure deficit that surpasses that of both indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Canada. This deficit contributes to the region’s lack of access to affordable and local foods, while also negatively impacting the region’s economic development and straining the region’s already limited healthcare system. To address these gaps, there is an urgent need to develop infrastructure that corresponds with the recommendations provided by Inuit organizations in recent years. Pressing infrastructure development includes public assets like marine and air infrastructure, harvesting enabling facilities, housing, and drinking water and sanitation infrastructure. As the North continues to experience faster rates of climate change in comparison to other regions of Canada, it is also crucial that all infrastructure development and adaptation in Inuit Nunangat prioritizes climate resilience.

The most pressing infrastructure deficit in Inuit Nunangat is the region’s lack of affordable and safe housing. Presently, 52% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded housing, severely impacting their health and socio-economic prospects. It is crucial that the federal government collaboratively engage with Inuit organizations, intensifying efforts and investments to enhance housing outcomes. The focus should be on developing affordable, climate-appropriate, and diversified housing options that improve the overall quality of life within these communities.

**RECOMMENDATION #4: RECOGNIZE INUKTUT AND OTHER INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF CANADA**

The transmission rates of Inuktitut as a mother tongue to Inuit children aged 0 to 14 years have been falling. For example, in 2001, 78.5% of Inuit children aged 0 to 4 years had Inuktitut as their mother tongue, compared to 68.4% in 2016—a decline of over 10 percentage points.<sup>22</sup>

Inuit traditional knowledge and culture is embedded within Inuit languages, such as Inuktitut and Innuinaqtun. This traditional knowledge includes essential knowledge about traditional hunting practices, place names, and Inuit culture and identity, law and worldviews. Currently, Canada only recognizes French and English as the nation’s official languages. Although the Indigenous Languages Act, passed in 2019, established an Indigenous Languages Commissioner and provided funding for language revitalization programs, the protections afforded to Indigenous languages are not comparable to the status of official languages. This continues Canada’s disparate treatment of Indigenous peoples rights and culture.

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<sup>22</sup>Jean-François Lepage, Stéphanie Langlois and Martin Turcotte, Statistics Canada, *Evolution of the language situation in Nunavut, 2001 to 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019010-eng.htm>