Honourable Senators, thank you for the invitation to contribute to your report on issues relating to security and defence in the Arctic. The Arctic is the homeland of many indigenous peoples including the Inuit.

I am Inuk, and I was born in Puvirnituq Nunavik, northern Quebec. Nunavik is the same region that Governor General Mary Simon is from, and the same region where your former colleague Senator Charlie Watt came from. We have a long history of working with government and military personnel from Canada, and the United States particularly since Kuujjuaq was also the home of a US Airbase during World War II.

I was invited to share my thoughts as the President of Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada (ICC Canada). In this role, it is my responsibility to lead Canadian Inuit efforts in exercising our right to self-determination in the international arena. Inuit Circumpolar Council unites the Inuit voice to participate in decision-making processes that touch upon our homeland in the circumpolar region, Inuit Nunaa, which extends from Greenland, Canada and Alaska to Chukotka (Russia). I am also the Vice President International of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) which is the National Inuit voice for Inuit. The ICC and ITK have boards of directors which include the leaders from each of the Inuit landclaim regions, Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association and the National Inuit Youth Council.

ICC Canada is part of a larger ICC organization which includes Inuit from Alaska, Greenland and Chukotka (Russia). We live in different countries with differing jurisdictional realities but we share Inuit values, and identity making us one people, one nation.

The principal goals of ICC are to strengthen unity among Inuit of the circumpolar region; promote Inuit rights and interests on an international level; 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.

We are permanent participants at the Arctic Council, and we have consultative status II at the United Nations. We are also the only Indigenous organization in the world with consultative
status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and are working to achieve permanent status.

In July of this year Alaskan, Canadian, Greenlandic and Chukotkan Inuit from across Inuit Nunaat (the Inuit homeland), gathered virtually for the ICC quadrennial General Assembly – this is a time for Inuit leadership to reflect on priorities, strengthen our solidarity across borders and celebrate our rich culture. The theme of this General Assembly was “Inuit Strength and Peace”.

We reaffirmed “that the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) exists as the unified voice for Inuit at the international level....” and upheld the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration of the Arctic Five States and their commitment to working peacefully within legal frameworks,”

Inuit recognize the increasing competition over the control of the Arctic, and the interrelated issues of climate change, marine vessel traffic, industrialization, militarization, and other activities that continue to threaten the well-being of our environmental, cultural, food, and socio-economic security.

ICC’s longstanding position is that it is in the interest of all circumpolar peoples – Indigenous and others – to ensure the Arctic shall forever continue to be used exclusively for peaceful and environmentally safe purposes and shall not become the scene or object of human conflict or discord.

The second document I will refer to is our 2009 Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic. The declaration called for Arctic States to work closely and constructively with Inuit to address concerns about international relations and the resolution of international disputes and to chart the future of the Arctic.

More than a decade ago, we recognized that we are in an era of environmental and global insecurity, and we recognized that the Arctic geopolitical landscape was changing. This document asserts that ICC is uniquely prepared to assess, address and voice the new challenges across our collective homeland of Inuit Nunaat. And that Inuit can help provide the solutions.

We know there is growing international interest and competition in the Arctic from state and non-state actors who seek to share in the region's rich natural resources and strategic position. This interest comes in many forms from international Arctic research and scientists in our communities and regions, investment in our infrastructure, to ships transiting though our waters. Security threats do not always have to be military.

This comes at a time where climate change, combined with advancements in technology, has made access to the region easier. While the Arctic has historically been — and continues to be — a region of stability and peace, growing competition and increased access brings safety and security challenges to which we all must be ready to respond.
As we have watched the Russian invasion of the Ukraine tragically play out over the past year, we cannot but cast our eyes further north and west to Russia which has the largest Arctic coastline.

From a Canadian security perspective, these areas demarcate Canada’s Arctic sovereignty: from the contiguous northern ice and seas bordering with Russia, to the Northwest Passage that is critical for maintaining marine security, to the eastern Arctic and Pikialasorsuaq that bridges Canada with Greenland, to the entry to southern Canada through Hudson’s Bay.

Consider for a moment the vast coastline, sea ice and land that Inuit call home. Consider also that we are one people who reside in 4 very different political realities. Inuit have used and occupied the land, coastline, ocean and ice for over 5,000 years we have adapted to many changes politically, culturally and socially and now environmentally but we still understand that through our solidarity we are stronger.

In 2018, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework was to be the policy guidance document for Canada and the Arctic at home, and in the larger global geopolitical landscape. The document states “Canada's Arctic and Northern governments and communities are at the heart of security in the region. Partnership, cooperation and shared leadership are essential to promoting security in this diverse, complex and expansive area. Working in partnership with trusted international allies and all levels of government, including Indigenous communities, organizations and governments, Canada will continue to protect the safety and security of the people in the Arctic and the North, now and into the future.”

But what security threats do we face today? I would suggest Russia is an existential “nuclear” threat, but our Arctic sovereignty is secure.

A well respected academic on this issue, Michael Byers, said recently:

“Protecting Canada against Russian aggression requires an understanding of two simple facts. Russia poses a serious nuclear threat to Canada and the United States. And Vladimir Putin is not about to invade the Canadian Arctic.”

Byers continued:

“Putin has broken the nuclear taboo — by threatening to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine — the upgrades (to NORAD) must be completed with urgency.”

As Gen. Wayne Eyre, Canada’s chief of the Defence staff, told the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence last month:

“I see no real threat today to our territorial sovereignty, nor do I see one in the near future.”
We could conclude Russia is not about to invade the Canadian Arctic, and so we should avoid wasting money and effort trying to protect against that. Perhaps the major Arctic security issues are all located in the European Arctic. Most of Russia’s naval and air power is based on the Kola Peninsula alongside the Barents Sea and Norway.

Russia’s nuclear submarines access the world’s oceans through the “Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap,” and NATO forces are kept busy monitoring activity in that region.

On this question of “hard security”, the 2010 ICC Inuit Arctic Policy has something to say.

It states that for many years the questions of security in the Arctic, defence and foreign policy issues have been traditionally the domain of state governments. However, policy-making concerning Arctic and global security is too crucial to exclude Inuit and should not be left solely to experts within the military and government. Those who live and occupy this region have a right to be part of decision making -- from community wellness to defense policy. Let’s not forget that not only are Inuit voices important, but we are also the eyes and ears of the first line of defense and our Inuit Rangers can attest to that.

Inuit believe that for true Arctic security to be achieved, there must be greater global security. New concepts of common security are urgently needed that incorporate environmental, health, social, cultural, and economic aspects. Security should not only be defined in military terms. In this context, respect for the rights, values, and perspectives of the Arctic’s Indigenous peoples is vital.

The ICC Inuit Arctic Policy states that “efforts should be made, through education programs, to teach students of different ages the values of disarmament, non-violent resolution of conflicts, and world peace. It is essential that the concept of an Arctic zone of peace be formally accepted by Arctic states and others as an explicit and political objective”.

In creating an Arctic zone of peace, consideration should be given to the following principles, among others:

- the zone of peace must foster international cooperation for solely peaceful purposes and must be free of nuclear weapons;
- testing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction must not be permissible;
- as a general rule, the safeguarding of the Arctic environment must take precedence over military exercises and activities;
- peacetime military activities that disrupt or undermine the territories, communities, rights, and security of indigenous and other northern peoples must not be allowed. This includes low-level and supersonic flight testing and training; and,
- international, circumpolar, and national systems of verification pertaining to arms control must be encouraged.
These rights and values were entrenched in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2009.

In accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I offer Article 27:

“States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples’ laws, traditions, customs, and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those that were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous Peoples shall have the rights to participate in this process.”

The Inuit Arctic Policy recognizes that there is a profound relationship between human rights, peace, and development. These pillars are not truly realizable in isolation from one another. And this position is echoed in the UNDRIP.

In a global context, peace is much more than an absence of war. It entails a fair and democratic system of international relations, based on principles of mutual and respectable co-operation as well as equitable development.

The right to peace should also include the right of Inuit and other Arctic peoples to participate in decision-making on peace-related issues, particularly when it relates to or affects the Arctic.

Numerous problems of the Arctic transcend the jurisdictional boundaries of states and can only be effectively dealt with through international cooperation, between and among peoples and governments. Cooperation, information sharing, and solidarity among northern peoples are increasingly vital, whether such peoples are Indigenous like Inuit, Saami, or not. In this way, Arctic peoples can better deal with the many problems and issues of social and political change.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council has an important role to play in circumpolar relations. State governments in the Arctic and from other capitals should support our work – our voice is globally important.

Consistent with principles of self-government, Inuit and other Arctic peoples should have direct input in the formulation and implementation of Arctic co-operation agreements between states in matters relevant to them – including and especially defence and security matters.

To further advance circumpolar regional cooperation, multilateral forums such as a strengthened Arctic Council – not weakened – are required in the Arctic. At a time of such upheaval within the council there is also an opportunity to show its strength, to show its vital importance as a forum on collaboration and communication and to leave a door open and a seat at the table for when Russia can re-engage on acceptable terms.

The Arctic is first and foremost the ancestral homeland of Inuit and other northern peoples.
In order to achieve real and lasting security in the Arctic, Inuit encourage the development of new notions of common security.

Such new concepts of security should be based on the promotion of human rights and international cooperation and include trade, cultural exchanges, environmental protection, food sovereignty, circumpolar research, and other peaceful initiatives.

Nakurmiq,

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