

**Returning Canada to a Path of Principle: an
Arctic and Inuit Perspective**

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Speech Notes for:

**The 9th LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture
Institute for Canadian Citizenship**

Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada

29 May 2009

Unnusakut, Good evening, Bonsoir. I am truly honoured to be with you tonight to present the 9th LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, and to have this remarkable opportunity to continue the conversation on Canada's quest for the public good, initiated by John Ralston Saul in 2000. I am especially pleased that we are having this discussion in my current home city of Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, and at a time when the Arctic is taking on a significant role in world affairs. I am also honoured to be joined here by our esteemed Inuit Elders, our Inuit leaders, many high officials from the territorial and federal governments, our youth, our community members and the many visitors from the 'south'.

Northern Canada faces many challenges. How we respond to them will reveal the sort of democracy we are creating in the northern half of the continent in this still-new millennium. While most Canadians

live in the south, close to the border with the United States, Canada remains an Arctic nation and everyday the Arctic looms larger in our consciousness. That is understandable as increasingly, what happens here in the Arctic will colour Canada's approach to the rest of the world. Adrienne Clarkson, Canada's former Governor General appreciated this before most people. Although she was highly criticized at the time by newspaper editorialists for her circumpolar tour in 2002, she was well ahead of her time in giving the North its due consideration.

As residents of this very special and majestic beautiful place, Inuit have a great responsibility. We occupy a unique position in Canadian society and, increasingly, in world affairs. As the Arctic becomes globally important, Inuit too are at a turning point or a crossroads in our development as a people—an

Indigenous people—within this great country we call Canada.

Today, I'm going to walk you through our Arctic story, describing the challenges we have faced and continue to confront, along with the remarkable successes we have achieved. Lastly, I will speak about where I hope we as a people, the Arctic as a region, and Canada as a mature democracy, will go from here. While I will talk about some of our challenges and moments where we have strayed from principles that have served us well as a Nation and as Indigenous Peoples, I will not dwell on the negative in order to criticize. Rather, I identify these lapses only because from this adversity the return to a principled path provides the power of leadership.

Inuit are a uniquely adaptable people. We have weathered the storm of modernization remarkably

well. Inuit in Canada have gone from dog-teams and igluvigaks, the Inuktitut term for igloo, to snowmobiles, jumbo jets, permanent homes, and even supermarkets, all within the past 50 years. Understandably, the speed in which these enormous changes happened knocked us off balance. We used to be the most independent and self-sufficient of Peoples, but we lost much control over our lives as a result of tumultuous change and multiple historical traumas.

Many families from specific communities were forcibly relocated to new communities not of their choosing in the name of sovereignty. They were the first to assert sovereignty for Canada.

Many of us, as children, were uprooted from our families and culture to be “educated,” a process that cut us off from our historic culture and language and

re-programmed to assimilate into a strange and alien way of life. I am a product of that era.

Children and family members were sent away for medical reasons never to be heard from or seen again.

Our dogs-- centrally important to our free movement and hunting—were slaughtered on the orders of southerners who did not understand this relationship. They sought to curtail our ability to travel as a means of keeping us in place.

In those days it was all about power and control. Sexual abuse occurred by those in authority positions.

Political agitation by non-governmental groups who had never visited and completely misunderstood our communities, aided by compliant politicians, caused

the collapse of our sealskin economy with hugely negative social consequences and here we go again with round two of that misguided, emotionally driven campaign which again only brings hardship to our Inuit world.

All of these processes resulted in a serious failure of Canadian democracy to advance the public good. Our governments themselves as they functioned from their own ignorance and colonial arrogance led us, as Inuit, astray from our own principled ways.

In addition, together these traumatic events deeply wounded and dispirited many, translating into ‘collective pain’ experienced by families and communities alike.

Substance abuse, health problems, and, most distressing, the loss of so many of our people to suicide, have been amongst the saddest results.

But through all of this, we have had our land, our predictable environment and climate, and the wisdom of our Hunters and Elders gained over millennia and passed down from generation to generation to help us adapt.

We remain, today, a hunting people of the land, ice, and snow. The process of the hunt teaches our young people to be patient, courageous, bold under pressure, and reflective. They learn to be focused and strategic and become natural conservationists. They learn to control their impulses, to withstand and cope with stressful situations, to develop sound judgment and ultimately wisdom. Silaturniq in our language.

Without these skills one could not survive for a day much less thrive for millennia which we Inuit have done.

Our hunting culture is not only relevant for survival on the land – it teaches crucial life skills and wisdom that are transferable to the modern world. Many Inuit who have acquired and continue to practice these traditional skills are in large part “making it” in the modern world.

One way of life does not have to be at the cost of another. In fact many Inuit who are connected to the values, principles, traditions, and wisdom of our traditional culture are better equipped and able to balance more effectively the two worlds. This important insight should be reflected in our public policies and programs toward the Arctic.

I am going to speak now about major international environmental challenges we face here in the Arctic.

I am convinced that we can successfully address these challenges by drawing once more upon our traditional knowledge, culture and wisdom and by adding our Indigenous voice to the international debate.

Persistent Organic Pollutants including DDT and PCBs and other compounds released into the environment far to the south are carried north on the winds and ocean currents. They accumulate in the bodies of our animals—particularly seals and whales—our country food. In the 80's through strong collaborated research, we discovered that these toxins ingested through our traditional subsistence diet were poisoning our bodies including the nursing milk of our mothers in concentrations far higher than people who live in the south. These persistent organic

pollutants impact us far more than any other people in the world and we in the Arctic become the net recipients of these toxins.

Other chemicals from the south have moved high into the atmosphere, and have caused a decline in the ozone layer around the world but with the greatest effects over the Polar Regions. . In the North we are exposed to higher levels of UV radiation than most of the rest of the world.

Lastly, climate change here in the Arctic is particularly rapid. The impacts and effects of climate change challenge and threaten our very right and ability to exist as an Indigenous people. We face dangerously unpredictable weather, extreme erosion along coastal communities and an invasion of new species of insects. In some areas of the circumpolar regions, during certain periods of the year, as

travelling and hunting on the land become more dangerous, fewer continue the traditional subsistence way of life. This can mean less and less of our culture is passed down to our young people.

As well, the decline in hunting increases the reliance on expensive, imported Southern goods and foods which are far less nutritious than eating what we hunt. Northern communities already have some of the highest growth rates of diabetes and other food-related illnesses in Canada, trends which will only continue as we shift away from a country food diet.

I am concerned that leaving behind our traditional food and adopting a less healthy southern lifestyle is another step toward the loss of our language, our arts, our culture, and our very way of life as an indigenous people.

Climate change has added a new layer of stress and uncertainty to our lives here, even as the nations of the world look north to the newly available shipping routes and newly accessible oil, gas and mineral resources. Routine international shipping through the Northwest Passage raises the likelihood of oil spills and contamination of our delicate and vulnerable ecosystem. Remember the Exxon Valdez in Alaska's Prince William Sound! Routine international shipping through the passage would be clear evidence that climate change has been allowed to go too far. As nations speak of developing the north, many, including our own, have begun to posture and threaten as they assert claims to Arctic sovereignty and ownership of natural resources. This has become a "hot button" political issue that in Canada even attracts votes in the South. Too often, those making these claims lose sight of the fact that the Arctic is not some frozen and barren wasteland but a rich,

warm world full of life, people and culture. The Arctic is definitely not the Antarctic.

I am particularly concerned about climate change for it threatens to erase the memory of who we are, where we have come from, and all that we wish to be. If we protect the environment and climate of the Arctic, keep our Inuit hunting culture alive, and stay connected to the rhythms and cycles of nature we will, as a people and as Canadians, prevail and thrive.

When I speak of these many traumas and challenges I do not to suggest that we need government to support us as a wounded or dependent people. I say these things to help you to understand our situation and to appreciate all the more our remarkable successes as a proud and resilient people. We do not need the Government of Canada to support us as dependents, but we do need Canada to work with us to develop

our potential for the good of our communities, our region and our world.

To give you some examples of these successes, I want to start with our young people.

Many of our young people are now taking on both worlds very effectively and I want to start by citing my grandson's father who is using modern technology at this very moment with Isuma TV to podcast this very Lecture however this weekend will likely take my 11 year old grandson to go goose hunting, teaching him the strength of our hunting culture.

Along with cultural activities which develop personal and physical powers and well being ,many of our young men impressively play hockey like many Canadians and play like pros and it is only a matter of

time that more Inuit young men will be along side our own Jordan Tootoo from Rankin Inlet in the NHL.

Isuma Productions who in fact is streaming this very Lecture around the globe has had monumental success. Zach Kunuk from Igloolik won the Camera d'Or in Cannes a few years ago for the movie Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner. In addition the main actor who played Atanarguak , Natar Ungalaaq has just won a Genie for his impressive and realistic role in the Necessities of Life.

There are young Inuit women from Nunavik and Nunavut who are now ambassadors for Inuit worldwide through our ancient art of throat singing and the demand continues to grow for their participation in global events.

There are three young Inuit singers who have forged their way into a very competitive industry of music with their own unique styles and are becoming known worldwide and that is Elisapee Issac , Lucie Idlout and Tanya Tagak Gillis.

There is so much talent from all of our regions that appeal to so many around the world for its realism depth and beauty. What Inuit offer to the world through our creativity is phenomenal. Considering our numbers here in the Arctic it is phenomenal the percentage of our gifted talent that is in high demand and recognized. This includes our artists, singers, filmmakers, graphic artists, carvers, fashion design, jewelry makers, print makers. This is a testament to how strong our essence and culture as Inuit remain and is portrayed through the creative and performing arts. There is as much ‘giving birth’ to life through these beautiful works of art that so grounded in spirit

as there are the losses that we face. We need to foster these remarkable successful endeavours much more than we have.

And we can mix creativity, traditions and business. The Pirurvik Centre here in Iqaluit teaches, protects and promotes Inuit language and culture by working with our Elders from across the region. Pirurvik just celebrated its five year anniversary yesterday. Its remarkable work has included the translation of Microsoft Programs; imagine some 800,000 words to date! Most likely the biggest translation project since the translation of the bible. Of those 800,000 words about 5000 of those Inuktitut words now become permanent words for new technological terminology. Very impressive....and if you want to start to learn Inuktitut on line click unto www.tusaalanga.ca

We have in our audience Inuit lawyers, most of them women who have succeeded in Nunavut's first Akitsiraq Law School. A second program is now in the works with the help of some of the graduates.

Do Canadians know we run many of our own businesses including successful airlines? And that we have many Inuit pilots now flying in our regions as well as Inuit jet pilots who fly for international airlines.

Do Canadians know that Mary Simon our National leader is one of the great thinkers behind the creation of the Arctic Council?

Just this year alone we have two more Inuit women blazing the trail as we now have our first woman Premier Eva Aariak and our first Federal Minister Leona Aqlugark both of Nunavut.

Do Canadians know we have our own John A? not as in MacDonald but Amagoalik, better known as the father of Nunavut but who also is a survivor of the Exiles whose family was relocated in the name of Sovereignty to the high Arctic and through his quiet and calm Inuit style demeanour continues to work to in his way to make it a better world for us.

Although there are more and more Inuit University graduates throughout our regions and we are truly proud of them all I do want to congratulate Jason Annahatak from Kangirsuk who has acquired several languages besides his own Inuktitut, in receiving his Masters degree in psychology from Columbia University in New York, USA just last week.

We have also had many successes within our international organizations as we proactively reached

out to the rest of the world and shared our Inuit organizational and institutional knowledge to other indigenous peoples around the world. Through our international organization the Inuit Circumpolar Council we continue to work with many UN Departments and Forums.

The United Nations Environment Programme sees the Arctic as the world's "barometer" of climate change. I think of us Inuit as the mercury in that barometer and as "responsible sentinels" of environmental change that we observe everyday in the Arctic. Of real importance, Inuit have reached out to warn the world of the effects of environmental change and to spur peoples and nations to action.

When the problem of Trans boundary contaminants—the POPs I mentioned earlier—became apparent, our organizations took strong, coordinated action. I was honored to serve as the spokesperson for a coalition

of Northern indigenous peoples during the global negotiations that resulted in the Stockholm Pops Convention, concluded in 2001. In that process, we shared our traditional knowledge gained from living on the land. Combined with good science—and at the time Canada was a leader in POPs science--we showed the world the human face of a very serious environmental problem. Our coalition built partnerships with environmental groups and less likely allies including government agencies and industry. We met with leaders of foreign governments and lobbied our own government. We actively engaged in the international negotiations and put the human face of the issue front and center. The Executive Director of UNEP said that we were the “conscience” of these global negotiations. I was proud that we persuaded countries to single out the Arctic and Indigenous communities in the Stockholm Convention—one of the fastest UN conventions to

have been signed, ratified and enforced in the history of the UN. Our country food is safer as a result of our influence in those negotiations.

As well, we have taken strong action on climate change, working to shift the world's thinking on this issue from one dominated by economics and technical science to human impacts, human rights and human development.

In December 2005, we submitted a climate change-related petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. This was the first time anywhere in the world that such a petition had been submitted to a human rights body. To prepare the petition we engaged a team that included our own counsel and advisors in the North and legal scholars from the U.S. and drew upon the compelling testimony and knowledge of Inuit in northern Canada and Alaska.

We sought a declaration from the Inter American Commission that the destruction of the Arctic environment and the culture and economy of Inuit as a result of virtually unrestricted emissions of greenhouse gases by the United States was violating our human rights guaranteed in the 1948 American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man. We stated that climate change was infringing our rights to subsistence, to health, to use of our traditional lands, and to our culture and environment.

We launched this petition from a position of focus and strength not victimhood. The purpose of the petition was to educate and encourage the Government of the United States to join the community of nations in a global campaign to combat climate change. It was not aggressive or confrontational. We were reaching out, not striking out. In a very real sense our petition was a “gift”

from Inuit hunters and elders to the world. It was an act of generosity from an ancient culture deeply tied to the natural environment and still in tune with its cycles and rhythms, to an urban, industrial, and “modern” culture that has largely lost its sense of place and position in the natural world.

I believe we helped to influence what had already started in the US: a real shift in the public debate on what to do about climate change. Our message has resonated with the rest of the World as well; the U.N. Human Rights Council has recognized climate change as a human rights issue for all indigenous peoples. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has responded to our call and now argues that we must use a human rights approach in responding to climate change that empowers individuals and communities and gives all those affected active participation in decision-making. I

think the wisdom of the land, once heard, strikes a universal cord. There is a hugely important lesson here—many people on our planet are searching for “balance” and “sustainability” in their lives and in their relationship with the natural world.

These successes remind us just how far and how quickly Inuit have come as a people in this new world, and of our extraordinary potential as Northerners, as Inuit, as Canadians, and as global citizens. They also demonstrate that, when we act from our hearts and passions as people, when we act from principle as a Nation – putting human rights at the forefront, working from the principle of “no-harm” – we can accomplish great achievements.

I see several important roles for Northerners, and for all in Canada, in securing the future of the Arctic and for retaking a principled path to guide us into the

future first; we must insist that our government take bold, courageous, principled action domestically and on the international stage to promote balanced, sustainable development in the Arctic. Our politicians are elected to make decisions that reflect the common good not private interests. They must not only offer hope but do so in principled, ethical ways. Canada is a wealthy nation with a privileged history. We have an obligation to “lead” on the global stage not just to follow. Our government must return to the forefront of the international negotiating table that it left years ago when we turned our back on the Kyoto Protocol even as we ratified this international agreement. We must retake the moral high ground that we have squandered if we are to convince other nations to reduce their own emissions. From an Arctic perspective, it is Canada’s foreign policy that is the key to preserving our Arctic future.

And there are new opportunities for Canadian leadership. In the last few years, scientists have concluded that Black Carbon or “soot” emitted from inefficient diesel engines and stoves is a significant contributing cause of climate change in the Arctic. The Government of Canada can lead the world to a new international agreement to reduce emissions of Black Carbon and to do so in co-operation with Arctic Indigenous peoples.

We should encourage our government to amplify in the international corridors of power the voices of indigenous and vulnerable communities from around the world. We are at a crucial point in the global effort to combat climate change. We just have to conclude in Copenhagen this December a strong successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. A new treaty offers perhaps the last best hope for us to come together as a true international community to reduce

and eventually eliminate greenhouse gas emissions before the changes to the world's climate spiral beyond out of control. In this effort, northern indigenous peoples must be more than “window dressing” or to be overridden by interests that too often control our development decisions and international negotiating positions. Rather, informing these decisions and positions should be infused with the wisdom of Northern cultures to promote a broad-based, principled re-thinking of our national approach to this most important of global issues.

The Government of Canada should follow a different path in responding to climate change, recognizing that climate change and Arctic sovereignty are sides of the same coin. As the Northwest Passage sea-ice coverage is lost—and recent science suggests that the passage will regularly be sea-ice free in summer within five to ten years-- Canada is pressed to defend

its sovereignty over the fabled passage. Canada maintains, with the full support of Inuit, that the Northwest Passage is “internal water” over which we have full jurisdiction and control, not an international strait as maintained by the US. Canada’s Arctic sovereignty is explicitly supported and referenced in the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. As Inuit know, the sea-ice, including the land-fast ice that covers much of the Passage, has offered our hunting culture a stable platform for travel for untold generations. That ice also offers the best defence against ships attempting the shorter route linking industrial areas in Asia, North America and Europe

Slowing down climate change would be the best long-term solution to enforcing Canada’s arctic sovereignty. Instead of aggressively dealing with climate change and becoming an international leader in these global efforts, Canada has decided that the

best way to defend its Arctic sovereignty is with the military through a new fleet of armed ice breakers. Canada, a peaceful nation, will now ‘defend’ the Arctic.

Canada should take another approach – a more principled and human-centered approach. As a great Canadian Lloyd Axworthy has advocated, and as I have suggested before, Canada should take the lead in the peaceful, cooperative management of the Arctic. Canada should take a relentlessly co-operative approach. To focus international attention and debate we should consider promoting new multilateral institutions, or greatly expanding the role of the eight-nation Arctic Council, which was established in 1996 largely as a Canadian foreign policy initiative

Others have even recommended an international body to manage Arctic hydrocarbons, modeled on the

program that kept the peace amongst several European nations after World War II who were competing fiercely over shared coal and iron reserves. Whatever international legal arrangements are negotiated, it is collaboration and co-operation, not competition and confrontation, that will secure Canada's future in the Arctic and that will best guaranty the safety of its people and the conservation of its lands and waters.

My preference and, I imagine, that of most of the world, is to avoid creating yet another region where relationships between nations are tense with strife and fear. The Arctic is one of the last peaceful and relatively pristine places in the world. Let's keep it that way. We should realize that thriving, human communities will speak more strongly to our Arctic sovereignty and Canada's national values than a fleet of armed ice breakers or barracks full of soldiers.

I acknowledge and applaud our government's campaign abroad to show that Inuit have an ancient culture here in the Arctic and that hunting seals is part and parcel of our culture. But this campaign must be matched by real action at home to empower us to become the best possible stewards of this land. There must be respect for the knowledge our hunters hold and what they have to offer to the scientific world. There must be a campaign to help bridge those divides that still clearly exist between fellow Canadians and other international communities in better understanding that we are still a hunting people who eat what we hunt and share what we hunt. When visitors come to our homeland, no matter who they are, and share our food with respect and not disdain, it is a good thing.....and I repeat it is a good and welcomed gesture.

How can Canada ensure the peaceful use of the Arctic and also promote respect for human rights, enabling this respect to radiate worldwide from the circumpolar North?

I propose revitalizing an old idea with a ‘made-in-Canada’ notion that draws upon the co-operative management arrangements in our Northern land claims agreements. In recognition of the global environmental importance of the Arctic, and drawing upon the historical stewardship and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples resident in the North, let us consider a new international project: an Arctic treaty that charges circumpolar Indigenous Peoples in co-operation with nation states with the stewardship of the region for the continued benefit of humankind. International co-management arrangements could integrate traditional and scientific

knowledge to ensure sound and peaceful use and management of the Arctic's natural resources.

This model represents a significant change from our Canada's current "use-it or lose-it" philosophy of Arctic development. Instead, this approach embraces the vision of a sustainably developed Arctic economy together with a carefully managed Arctic ecosystem.

This type of vision was embraced at a U.N. gathering of nations in Iceland, which concluded that Arctic nations should fulfil their stewardship obligations, or agree to put in place a new treaty system to protect and preserve the Arctic... Inuit are ideally positioned to showcase to the world a model of sustainable development and environmental management, and Canada could as well if it committed to full and complete implementation of northern land claims and aboriginal self-government agreements and agreed to accept the UN Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples. Let's bear in mind that our region connects nations around the globe, and that Indigenous peoples in northern Canada have very close relationships with Indigenous peoples throughout the circumpolar world.

As wise stewards of our land, I would urge my own people to refuse the dangerous compromises between our principles and development that might diminish our own moral standing and claim to high ground as indigenous peoples. As we call on the world to change its ecologically degrading practices, we must not accept those practices at home no matter how desperate our need for jobs or economic development. Economic gain must not override the existence and well being of a whole people whose way of life is already being severely taxed. We must not let the prospect of development in the Arctic diminish our ability and our region's ability to teach

the "life centered sustainability" that Arctic Peoples have practiced for millennia. The people whose lives depend upon the ice and snow for cultural survival must be a central component of all our plans. We must not permit the discussion of northern development to be conducted only in terms of sovereignty, resources, and economics. The focus must be on the human dimension, human communities and protection of human cultural rights.

I want to stress here that I am not saying we should halt economic development in the Arctic or elsewhere in the world. Rather, we must retake control over development by insisting that every opportunity and program be systematically analyzed for its impact on the world; including the greenhouse gases it will emit, the unsustainable cycles it will feed, and the lasting impact it will have on our delicate landscape and the health of our people. We

must recognize in our decisions the full costs and benefits of our actions. We can still produce healthy profits for our companies, industries and economies, but we must do so in a manner far more sustainable than the thoughtless development of the past. We must think more broadly and inclusively and consider all the implications of what we are doing, and not only for ourselves and future generations, but for all of those to whom we are connected around the world. As we do so, we will be able to ask those around the world—our fellow citizens of the globe—to make similar decisions that take into account our rights and interests. The balance then, is really in understanding our interconnection with all of humanity, and working to ensure all of humanity understands that connection with us.

We cannot and should not separate political and economic development in our communities from the

education of individuals and families. Every level of the governance system here in the North must be mobilized to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and wisdom is the foundation of sustainable economic endeavor. Inuit were once highly independent. We had our own education, justice, health, and social systems based upon Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Historically, our sustainable way of life was based upon the cultural objective of developing wisdom. We knew what needed to be done and we did it successfully and sustainably without being told what to do or how to do it. I believe we can return to this sustainable cultural system again, but we must do so by stepping away from cycles of dependency on our government. I hope and invite the rest of Canada to understand that much of the root of the challenges of northern peoples are a result of dependencies which help to erode a sense of identity, self-worth and the ability to think and act for oneself, in turn

translate into the monumental health, which includes mental health and social challenges which all too often are misunderstood as an inability to adapt to the modern world.

This is not the full truth. We as aboriginal peoples were and continue to be marginalized and groomed towards dependencies that show itself in the dispiritedness, violence and poverty in our communities.

As John Ralston's Saul indicates in his recent book *A Fair Country that the Politics of Pity* only makes for a weaker and unprincipled Canada.

I believe Canada must move towards the politics of hope and the politics of empowerment by assuring the honor of the crown by implementing our northern

land claim agreements, and in view of our incredible and great geography and distances between communities and the south Canada should help in the area of infrastructure by upgrading and building when needed reliable and consistent communications systems to keep northern communities up to par with fellow Canadians in how we communicate with one another and beyond. Canada should also help by investing in something that Canadians take for granted in the south such as banking which would go a long way to northerners to help regain self reliance.

This is Canada's moment to lead by example—to take a principled stance on the national and global stage. All Canadians must realize that it's only by thinking and acting globally that we'll be able to make badly changes here at home. Only by setting an example at home, adhering to our principles, respecting one another and becoming wise stewards

of our vast natural resources, can we can motivate others by our example.

I hope that our story from the North including an awareness of the challenges we face in years to come, has given you some insight into how you might contribute to the public good by engaging in our democracy in your own way. I urge you each to take courageous, principled leadership to move our Arctic, our nation, and our world forward.

Nakuqmiik