

# 2030 NORTH

## **President's Speech**

Opening Remarks by Mary Simon

Ottawa, Ontario

June 2, 2009

I would like to welcome everyone to CARC's National Planning Conference - 2030 NORTH.

I was approached by David Gladders many months ago to co-chair this Conference. I was pleased to accept that invitation then, and I am happy to be with you this week. Let me thank Sheila Watt-Cloutier from what I heard give us such a compelling message yesterday evening. Sheila very ably set the context for our work. And very convincingly called upon all of us, and especially opinion leaders and policy and decision makers, to live up to the challenges of our time.

To accept realities, however unpleasant or unwelcome some may be.

To identify real and sustainable options.

To make hard choices.

And to be able to look succeeding generations in the face.

As President of ITK, I have been traveling extensively across Canada over the past two years talking about the Arctic and the North. One of the messages that I have been delivering is that Canada's North is a region 'whose time has come'. Canada's North has become the focus of a complex set of domestic and international geopolitical forces. And all Canadians need to pay attention to that new reality. We have gathered an impressive group of people at this meeting to paint a comprehensive picture of the North over the next two decades and beyond. A picture of where the North is headed given current trends and risks. And a picture of how the North could be shaped for the better. If we use our insights. And use our imaginations. And show our determination and our strength of character.

Our purpose is to help shape a new vision of the North.

And to set appropriate goals and benchmarks to drive policy and decision making and implementation. There is a wealth of experience in this room. Many of us here have been working on these issues for decades. In my capacity as Ambassador for

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Circumpolar Affairs in the late 1990s, I was actively involved in crafting and promoting a domestic and international Arctic and northern agenda for Canada.

Some 10 years later, we are facing many of the same challenges. But with an increased sense of urgency. The clock is ticking on climate change. Prince Charles noted last week that we are living in the 'last chance saloon'. Our collective responsibility is to do what is needed to combat global climate change. We need to move beyond conferences and banal statements.

We must act.

And we must act with decisiveness.

All countries must commit to slowing down and stabilizing, within finite timelines, the production of carbon emissions that will otherwise push planetary temperatures to disastrous levels. The urgencies of addressing climate change transcend all other issues. The sovereign claims of states in the Arctic will be of little value if humanity's sovereign responsibilities for the earth as a whole are not respected. It is true that there are more conventional issues of sovereignty in the Arctic. Some fear that aspects of Canada's sovereignty in the North is under threat. Russia, the United States, Denmark, and now the European Union and countries even further removed are all part of the mix.

Yet it would be a mistake to see issues of sovereignty in the Arctic strictly in the old-fashioned sense of inter-state relations, military calculations and activities, and formal diplomatic agreements and exchanges. Many of us in the room today honed our research and advocacy skills in the 1960s and 1970s. We recall the heated discussions around the sale of unprocessed natural resources to foreign interests. Our North was described by a senior Canadian politician at the time as "a frozen treasure chest". But there is a big difference between those years and today.

The Aboriginal peoples of the Arctic are no longer willing to be at the margins of political and economic life. Land claims agreements and new governance structures have been concluded across the North. These set out many of the rights of Aboriginal peoples and provide an array of tools for us to more effectively participate in policy debates and development. The rights of Aboriginal peoples in domestic law are supplemented by the increasing international recognition of the rights and roles of indigenous peoples. The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples acknowledges the collective human rights of indigenous peoples around the world, including the right of self-determination and extensive rights to traditional lands and territories.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council's recent Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic makes it very clear that Inuit must be an active partner in the conduct of

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international relations in the Arctic. For legal, political and practical reasons, the new Arctic and Northern policy universe now requires the full participation of Aboriginal peoples.

Science and research have very important roles to play in setting a new course in policy making. The foundation of all good-decision making is appropriate information. Decades ago, Aboriginal peoples had to push their way into the research agenda. Today, science and research agendas for the Arctic and North must take their lead from the peoples of the Arctic and North, drawing on our capacity where it is abundant and contributing to its growth where it is lacking.

Finally, without overlooking the new international dynamics affecting the conduct of all international relations in the Arctic, including the role of indigenous peoples, we will be looking at Canada's own northern foreign policy and our nation's role in shaping international policy during our meeting. I cannot overstate the importance of Canada taking an enlightened and open-minded leadership role. None of the matters we are discussing over the next days can be handled alone. We have learned the value of cooperation through our work in the Arctic Council. We have also felt the bite from misguided decisions by foreign governments.

One of my proudest moments was our launching of the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy in 2000. Permit me to observe that "what goes around comes around". Many of the challenges we identified remain ... only more so. The pieces are in place. We have the intellectual resources available. Arctic and Northern peoples and Northern governments are ready. A year after the historic Apology on residential schools, the federal government has an opportunity to push hard on a refocused northern strategy.

This conference will make an important contribution.

I am looking forward to the discussions.

Thank you.