

National Inuit Leader Says Census Data points to Call for Action.

Tuesday January 15, 2008 – Ottawa, Ontario – The President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Mary Simon says Inuit must recognize that the Inuit language is eroding and be prepared to do whatever is necessary to reverse this trend to protect, preserve and enhance the Inuit language and the different dialects that we speak. Ms. Simon was responding the Statistics Canada 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey that reported an overall erosion of Inuit Languages.

“Let’s not kid ourselves, the state of our Inuit language is in critical condition, and if we lose our language, then we will have lost our culture,” said Mary Simon. “I don’t want to be looking at statistics in 2011 that point to further erosion of our precious language. The numbers released today confirm a trend that our language is eroding, slowly but surely.”

“This report by Statistics Canada must be a wake up call by Inuit everywhere, to be prepared to fight to preserve our language. We must insist on the use of Inuktitut in our homes, schools, workplace and even playgrounds. We all have a role to play and we must be prepared to use all of our political clout to demand support from Government, federal, provincial and territorial. The government of Canada needs to act now. It’s fine to have two official languages, but across the Arctic, Inuktitut is the official language, and today’s data indicates it needs protection. As an Inuit leader, I will act on this important issue.”

Simon also reacted strongly to the data on housing conditions. “These statistic can be misleading because they point to a very slight reduction in the crowding statistics across Inuit Nunaat (the four Inuit regions – Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Region), since the last survey.

However the overall housing situation remains unacceptable and Inuit are still 10 times more likely to live in overcrowded houses versus non-aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, the data reveals the extent to which Inuit live in homes that require major structural repair. It points to the need for long-term housing programs and an immediate national Inuit Housing initiative from the Government of Canada.

Overcrowding has negative consequences for Inuit. “It contributes to poor health for our children,” says Mary Simon. “Our children suffer from the highest rates of respiratory ailments in the western world as a direct result of this overcrowding situation. Furthermore, overcrowding makes completing primary and secondary education that much more difficult given the lack of space to study and do homework.”

Today’s census release also demonstrates that our Inuit population is the youngest in Canada. 12% of Inuit children are under the age of 4 as compared to 5% of non aboriginal Canadians. “There is already a gap in Early Childhood programming in Inuit Nunaat,” said Mary Simon. “The increase in this demographic in our communities will require increased access to Day care, for example.”

Today’s data also tells a story of more Inuit moving to urban centers. The number of Inuit in urban centers in 1996 was 5,235. In 2006 that number jumped to 8,395, an increase of over 60%. “This exodus from our communities and homelands is most disturbing. It’s important for us to understand why so many people are moving south - is it related to the already unacceptable social statistics including the health and housing statistics? We need to understand the reasons, and so does the government of Canada and together we must be prepared to address it,” said Mary Simon.

source:

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