Affaires Indiennes et du Nord Canada
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Canada

Northwest Territories Region Module

This section is used for the facilitator to become familiar with some of the general issues of the region. It is Section Six - Part Two of the Facilitator's Guide and is to be used in conjunction with that section. As the regional sessions are designed to be presented by speakers from the community and region, this section is informational, but could be used as a basis for a presentation if necessary.

There are 9 separate modules available, each relating to a different region.

Alberta Region Module
Atlantic Region Module
British Columbia Region Module
Manitoba Region Module
Northwest Territories Module
Ontario Region Module
Quebec Region Module
Saskatchewan Region Module
Yukon Territories Module

Table of Contents

The First Nations of the Northwest Territories

The vast northern reaches of the continent that now lie within the boundaries of the Northwest territories are one of the oldest continually inhabited parts of Canada. Today, four First Nations live within the area.

The Dene

The Dene of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta have lived in the region for at least the past 4,000 years and, quite probably, for an even longer period of time. The present Dene population of the Territories is approximately 8,000.

The Dene are an Athapaskan people whose traditional homeland -- Denendeh, the land of the Dene -- stretched from the Mackenzie River in the east to Alaska in the west. The present day Dene nation is composed of five Dene tribal groups and one group of northern Cree.

Traditionally, prior to European contact, the Dene lived in small widely dispersed communities and spoke a number of more or less mutually comprehensible dialects. While European explorers and traders gave them a variety of European names, they have always referred to themselves simply as Dene, the Athapaskan word for their own people. Roughly speaking, as we move south, from the Mackenzie Delta to the Alberta border, we encounter the various Dene tribal groups in the following order: Gwich'in, the Sahtu Dene, the Deh Cho, the North Slave (Dogrib Nation), and the South Slavey.

The Metis

The 5,000 Metis of the Mackenzie Valley are primarily of Dene and European ancestry. Some, however, are also the descendants of Metis who fled to the relative freedom of the north in 1885, after the final chapter of the Riel Rebellion.

The Metis and the Dene share many of the twenty-seven communities scattered across the Mackenzie Valley. They also share similar social and economic circumstances. They are, however, to a greater or lesser extreme, separated by ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences.

The racial complexity and inter-relatedness of the Dene and Metis in the Mackenzie Valley gives rise to a situation unique above the sixteenth parallel. The legal and ethnic divisions between the Metis, status and non-status 'Indians' has, in the past, tended to

weaken the negotiating power of the general aboriginal community in the Mackenzie region.

The Inuit or Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic

The Inuvialuit are an Inuit nation who live in half a dozen island communities -- Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Holman Island, Inuvik and Aklavik -- in the Beaufort Sea and Mackenzie Delta area of the western Arctic region of the Territories. Most of today's Inuvialuit are the descendants of Inuit who settled in the area in relatively recent times.

In the 1830's, at the time of first contact with Europeans, there were an estimated 2,000 Inuit living in the region. A century later, by 1930, there were only a dozen living descendants of these original inhabitants of the area. Some 300 other Inuit then living in the region had migrated from Alaska. Today, strengthened by Inuit from other regions of the Arctic, the Inuvialuit number is approximately 2,500.

Some Inuvialuit still speak a dialect of Inuktitut that is so distinctive that it is frequently considered a separate language, Inuvialuktun, with three recognized dialects of its own.

The Inuit of the Central and Eastern Arctic

Today, the Inuit of the central and eastern Arctic number approximately 17,000 and lives in a variety of small communities scattered over a huge region -- know as Nunavut -- stretching from Eskimo Point to Crise Fiord and from Coppermine to Iqaluit.

Traditionally, prior to European contact, the various Inuit peoples of the Territories lived largely in political, cultural and linguistic separation from one another. The vast distances and topographical barriers that separated communities ensured minimum contact.

While all the Inuit peoples of the region speak mutually comprehensible dialects of the same language, they were traditionally (and, to a certain extent, continue to be) distinguished from one another by significant differences in culture, technology and social organization.

The archaeological record of the region shows a continuous and unbroken Inuit habitation spanning almost 4,000 years.

Traditional Cultures and Early Euro-Canadian Relations

The present day Northwest Territories encompass a huge land mass divided from east to west by no less than three time zones. The Territory is an artificial socio-political creation of southern Canadian society. As such, it possesses little indigenous historical, cultural or geographic unity. As a consequence, the cultures and histories of the first nations differ significantly from region to region and are best dealt with on a separate and individual basis.

The Inuit are the first of these two broad cultural and historical groups within the Territories. They, in turn, are divided between two distinct and widely separated homeland regions.

1. Nunavut composed of the Inuit lands of the central and eastern Arctic, and;

2. the land of the Inuvialuit in the western Arctic of the Beaufort Sea and Mackenzie Delta.

Secondly, there are the Dene and Metis lands that stretch from the Mackenzie Delta south to the Alberta border.

The Inuit of Nunavut and the Western Arctic

Seven of Canada's eighth main Inuit cultural groups live within the current Northwest Territories. They are frequently identified by the following names:

- Inuvialuit
- The Baffin Island
- Ungava
- Iglulik
- Caribou
- Netsilik
- Copper Inuit

Traditionally, all spoke dialects of a single language but significant differences distinguished; one dialect from another. As we have seen, the dialect spoken by many of the Inuvialuit of the western Arctic, Inuvialuktun, is different enough to sometimes be considered a language to itself. Today, mass communications (such as the development of Inuit radio and television programming) and increased travel

opportunities are rapidly working to decrease linguistic differences. Prior to European contact the cultures of the Inuit peoples were oral or non-literate. Very soon after the first contacts with European missionaries, however, writing systems were widely adopted. As early as 1920 the adult literacy rate among the Inuit was nearly 100%.

Recent archaeological evidence strongly indicates a Viking presence in the eastern region a thousand years ago. However, the climate and remoteness of the north long protected the Inuit from sustained and significant contact with Europeans and Euro-Canadians.

Largely through the Hudson's Bay Company, fleeting and sporadic trade contacts were established between the Inuit and Europeans as early as the 18th century. It was, however, only during the later half of the 19th century that contact became socially and culturally significant. Explorers and commercial whalers entered the Arctic Ocean in numbers and on a regular basis, introducing the Inuit to trade and outside goods.

Climatically, the Arctic region is one of the most inhospitable on earth. The traditional life of the Inuit was a constant struggle for survival. Socially, the people were organized into small, family centered, hunting groups. These small communities were combined to form regional bands which, in turn, comprised the larger tribal or cultural groups.

Marriage and language ties cemented the tribal groups together and forged the basis of a common identity. It seems that in traditional times the larger tribal units rarely, if ever, gathered together. For most of the year, and sometimes for longer periods, life was lived within the local community of the hunting band. Occasionally, for brief periods -- ordinarily during the winter months -- the regional bands shared a communal life within the sealing camps.

The traditional Inuit household generally consisted of a nuclear family and a few elderly or unmarried relatives. In most community bands many of the families were united by extended kinship ties. The family unit and the local band were the basic economic facts of traditional Inuit life. The challenge and severity of the Arctic environment dictated a high degree of cooperation and social sharing and these remain predominant characteristics of contemporary Inuit life.

Within the traditional Inuit community existence was highly egalitarian. Apart from the spiritual leadership of the shaman, the exercise of power and authority was largely informal and based upon persuasion and hunting skills.

The economics of most traditional Inuit communities differed in accordance with the resources and dictates of the local environment. The hunt for various sea mammals was basic to many Inuit societies. In summer or fall many groups hunted caribou or moved to coastal locations to hunt and fish for a variety of species.

The Inuit were the last of the country's first nations to come into sustained contact with Euro-Canadian society. This occurred in the period immediately following the First World War.

As elsewhere, one of the first and the most devastating effects of contact with outsiders was the introduction of fatal, previously unknown diseases. Smallpox and influenza were particularly deadly. During the fist decades of the century, the Sadlermuit Inuit in the eastern region to the northwest of Hudson's Bay were wiped out by such diseases.

As we have seen, by the turn of the century, most of the original Inuit inhabitants of the Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort Sea area in the western Arctic had also died of the same 'virgin-soil' epidemics that wiped out the Sadlermuit and decimated Inuit peoples throughout the Arctic during the same period. In the western Arctic, the diseases were transmitted primarily via the American whaling ships that began penetrating into the region during the 1880's.

Within Inuit society, the traditional spiritual or religious leader of the community was the shaman. After undergoing a lengthy and rigorous course of preparation and training, he acted as the intermediary between his people and the various spiritual forces believed to guide and determine human destines.

Sustained contact with Euro-Canadian society rapidly wrought many and profound cultural changes among the Inuit. Many of the intricate and highly ingenious tools and material artifacts of the people were replaced by imported European goods. As the 20th century began the Inuit universally embraced Christianity and abandoned many traditional religious ideas and practices. The language, laws and customary patterns of traditional Inuit life all quickly changed in the course of a few decades.

As throughout the north, the Canadian state took little notice of the Inuit until after the Second World War. Increasingly, in the 1940's and 50's, several factors combined to push Ottawa's involvement upon the people of the region.

- Canada suddenly decided that it had to reinforce its claim to sovereignty over the north. An active involvement in the hitherto independent lives of the Inuit was one primary way of establishing and asserting national sovereignty.

- The introduction of the Canadian welfare state drew the national government further into the lives of all those within the country's formal borders. The deliverance of family allowance benefits and old age pensions required a federal presence in the north.

- Finally, national and international embarrassment must be added to the list. In the 1950's writers such as Farley Mowat (in novels such as *People of the Deer*)

brought the starvation and general social plight of the Inuit to media attention. With the publicity came a shame that mandated action in Ottawa.

Gradually, throughout the period immediately following World War II, the Inuit of the area came to live in fixed settlements and accept the financial benefits offered by Ottawa. Almost over night people who had known complete independence and countless centuries of self-rule, were brought into dependence upon and paternalistic control by the officials of a government both remote and foreign.

The Dene and Metis of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta

Nowhere in the north is there a greater mix nor a richer complexity of cultures than in the region of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta.

The various first nations of the Mackenzie -- who collectively refer to themselves as Dene -- all speak languages belonging to the Athapaskan cultural and linguistic family.

The relative scarcity of game in the north, combined with the migratory patterns of animal herds, dictated a semi-nomadic way of life. Hunting territories frequently covered vast distances.

As with their Inuit neighbours further north, the basic social unit was the hunting band. Such bands tended to be small, consisting of fewer than a hundred persons. Each band held its own hunting territory and lived an existence largely independent of other bands within the nation.

Leadership tended to be flexible and most leaders were chosen on a temporary basis according to the current needs of the community. Thus, during the caribou hunt, the best hunters automatically tended to assume leadership roles.

All the first nations of the Mackenzie region possessed their own systems of traditional religious belief. Their cultures possessed a spiritual dimension and religious depth that tended to pervade every aspect of their way of life. The religious leader or shaman was one of the most influential and well-respected members of the community. Frequently, the shaman performed medical duties, predicted weather and directed the hunters of the community where to look for game.

Sustained contact between the Dene and Europeans began with the establishment of a fur trade post on Lake Athabaska in 1778. By 1840, with the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort McPherson, the Mackenzie region and its people were firmly drawn into the commercial world of Canadian and European society. By the late 19th century fur trading posts were established throughout the Mackenzie Valley.

These trading posts of the North West Company and, later, of the Hudson's Bay Company, provided the first nuclei of Euro-Canadian and Metis settlements in the Mackenzie. By 1850 the first Roman Catholic and Anglican missions were established near the trading post communities. It was not until the last decades of the 19th century, however, that a substantial and permanent non-native presence was established in the area.

The institution of the fur trade economy and the missionary activities of the Christian churches rapidly wrought great cultural and social change among the Dene. Ancient patterns of life and systems of belief were seriously altered, transformed or abandoned under the persuasion and duress of the newcomers.

The Dene, however, were largely unaffected by the industrial revolution that gripped southern Canada in the late 19th century. The political and economic growth of the newly independent country had little effect upon the northern frontier lands of the Mackenzie region.

As elsewhere, one of the most devastating effects of contact was the spread of contagious disease. In the 1830's smallpox ravished the aboriginal communities of the Valley. The influenza epidemic that followed the First World War had one of the country's highest and most appalling mortality rates in the Mackenzie area.

The formal presence of Canadian authority only arrived with the first RCMP detachments in the early years of the 20th century.

During the first half of the present century, the Canadian government took little interest in the Mackenzie region. Briefly, in the years after the First World War, Ottawa's interest was stirred by the discovery of oil at Norman Wells. The illusory promise of a northern oil boom inspired action and, in 1921, the only treaty exclusively between the federal government and the first nations of the Territories was signed.

On the part of Ottawa, *Treaty 11* had the same intention as the ten numbered treaties preceding it. It sought to extinguish aboriginal land title with a view to economic development and settlement. It was to differ from these earlier agreements in that many of its signatories lived into an age when the treaty process itself was brought into question.

As with the Inuit, it was not until after the Second World War that the Dene began to feel the full involvement of the federal government in their lives. The new 'Family Allowance' and 'Old Age Pensions' programs drew the Dene off the land into settled life in a string of small communities along the Mackenzie River. This process of settlement has been aptly called the "micro-urbanization of the North". From this point forward the pressures of social and cultural change intensified and quickened for the Dene.

The strong presence of the Metis community in the Mackenzie Basin has long both enriched and complicated the social and political affairs of the region.

When *Treaty 11* was signed in 1921 many of the Metis of the Mackenzie were given a choice. They could sign the treaty along with their Dene relatives and neighbours. If they chose to do so, they legally became 'Indians', with all such status implied, under the terms of the *Indian Act*. As an alternative to signing the treaty, they could accept "scrip" instead. Scrip entitling them to either land or a cash payment but functioned to exclude them and their descendants from 'Indian status' under the *Indian Act.*

The area also contained a substantial aboriginal population who were without status under the terms of the *Indian Act.* Many of these people did not think of themselves as Metis but were left outside the treaty process by restrictions and definitions imposed by the *Indian Act* and by federal regulations, assumptions and procedures.

Relations between the Metis and Dene vary from community to community throughout the Mackenzie. In some places the cultural and social distinctions are sharper than in others. In many communities the distinction is blurred into relative insignificance.

What is clear is that the distinction is largely the product of European and Euro-Canadian racial thinking in times past. Throughout the English-speaking world in the course of the last two centuries, 'blood' or race was given a social importance it, thankfully, no longer possesses. For the Mackenzie region, one sad legacy of the initial years of contact were imported racial divisions that frequently functioned to divide two peoples whose ancestry and ways of life were substantially the same.

Land Claims and Self-Government Today

Introduction

As we have seen, it was only following the Second World War that the power of the federal government began to be seriously felt in the daily lives of most of the indigenous peoples of the Territories. It was during this period that the Inuit and Dene were finally pulled off the land and torn from their traditional semi-nomadic ways of life. Settled in fixed communities, the First Nations of the north became largely and increasingly dependent upon monies and services provided by Ottawa.

For both the Inuit and the Dene, the rate of social and cultural change throughout the 1940's and 50's was staggering. However, in the decades that followed, relations between the first nations of the Territories and Canadian society were to play out differently than they had in the south. A variety of general factors and circumstances insured that a significantly different pattern of Aboriginal/Canadian relations prevailed in the region.

There are at least four main reasons for these differences.

1. For the first time, entire generations of both communities were systematically uprooted from their own languages and cultures through the agency of the residential school. These young people were forced to become a transitional generation. Frequently, they alone were available to act as translators and interpreters between their parents and the southern Canadian representatives and authorities who were now a permanent and daily presence in the life of their communities.

   Among both the Inuit and the Dene, education combined with this transitional role, gave rise to a generation of people prepared to evaluate and take on the basic political issues facing their peoples. As John Amagoalik, an Inuit politician, once explained:

   > *"We were the only age group in our whole people who could understand the white man. As a result we were always interpreting between our parents, the policeman, the doctor, the teacher, the civil servant. So a lot of people my age really got into aboriginal issues. We were sort of pushed into it without really realizing it. We just picked up from there and carried on, trying to bridge this gap between the new world and our people."*

Thus, for the first time in the history of the Canadian state, Ottawa faced an increasingly articulate and politically conscious generation of native leaders at the very moment it moved to assert its power and authority over their peoples.

2. What is more, in the Northwest Territories, again for the first time in Canadian history, the demographics of a political jurisdiction favoured the native peoples. The Inuit, Dene and Metis inhabitants of the Territories make up the majority of the population. They have thus come to exercise a power, control and influence denied the first nations of the south.

3. The 1960's and 70's marked a significant change in the general attitude of the Canadian public toward the country's First Nations and the issues that concerned them. The racism and injustice of past governmental policies were beginning to be recognized and accepted. As a consequence, the public and political figures were increasingly open to new and more generous arrangements.

4. Finally, the north was largely a blank slate as far as negotiated agreements between the government and the first nations were concerned.

Only two of the numbered treaties (8 and 11) concerned the Northwest Territories. *Treaty 8* was concluded in 1899 and applied to a relatively small portion of the Territories adjacent to the Alberta border. *Treaty 11*, as we have seen, was signed in 1921 and applied to most of the Mackenzie Valley. As far as the First Nations of the Northwest Territories are concerned, however, both agreements proved largely abortive and have been superseded by new agreements or negotiations.

Many of the signatories to *Treaty 11* were still alive in the 1970's and they convincingly raised the issues of intention and interpretation. The treaty process was both complicated and foreign to the cultures of the first nations involved. The Dene elders who had signed in 1921 claimed that they had not understood the legal implications of what they were endorsing. They had, in effect, been tricked into assenting to an agreement whose details and effects were largely beyond their comprehension at the time.

In the early 1970's, this argument found an eloquent proponent in the person of Rene Fumoleau. In his influential book, *As Long as the Land Shall Last*, he stressed the essential differences in understanding, concerning the treaties that existed between the government negotiators and the Dene signatories.

> *"Whatever the government intended to do, cession of land, extinguishing of title or monetary settlement of aboriginal rights, was not explained to the chiefs who signed the Treaty. The Indians accepted the Treaty without understanding all of its terms and implications."*

On the side of the Dene, the treaties were seen as agreements of peace and friendship. They were not viewed as involving either the surrender of land or the renunciation of timeless aboriginal rights:

> *"They saw the white man's treaty as his way of offering them his help and friendship. They were willing to share their land with him in the manner prescribed by their tradition and culture. The two races would live side by side in the North, embarking on a common future."*

These arguments found an increasingly receptive audience in southern Canada in the 1960's and 70's. The obvious failure and injustices of the *Indian Act*, combined with the appalling poverty and social conditions that prevailed in many southern reserve communities, all argued for the advisability of a new and more generous approach in the north. Thus, when the modern period of treaty negotiations opened in the north in the mid-seventies, the Northwest Territories were to be considered a largely blank slate upon which a new, more honest and just record of negotiations could be written.

The Western Arctic: The Inuvialuit Agreement

In the mid-70's the Inuit of the western Arctic became politically active and began the process of negotiating with the federal government. They created their own community organization, *The Committee for Aboriginal People's Entitlement (COPE)* and in 1977 presented Ottawa with a comprehensive land claim entitled *"Inuvialuit Nunangat"* meaning "Land of the People of the Western Arctic".

The principal demands of the claim were for:

- a land base;
- control over natural resources; and
- a decisive voice in any future development of the region's lands and resources.

Surprisingly, given the delays typical of subsequent negotiations, the Inuvialuit claim was settled with relative speed. A key factor in the swiftness with which the agreement was reached was the willingness of the Inuvialuit to accept the principle of the extinguishment of aboriginal rights.

- By late 1977 an agreement concerning wildlife management within the area had been reached.
- In October 1978 an agreement in principle was singed.

- By the spring of 1979 an agreement was reached on which lands the Inuvialuit would claim under the final agreement.

Between 1979 and 1983 negotiations broke down and floundered.

- Discussions resumed successfully in early 1983.
- The final agreement was signed on June 5, 1984.

In return for agreeing to extinguish their claim to large tracts of the western Arctic, the Inuvialuit were given:

- clear title to 11,000 square kilometres of land with surface and sub-arctic rights;
- title to another 78,000 square kilometres with all rights except gas and oil rights; and
- in addition to various other benefits, 45 million dollars in cash to be paid by Ottawa between 1984 and 1997.

One clause in the agreement had future potential for the revival of an important Inuvialuit dream. It provided that, if any of their neighbours achieved self-government, the Inuvialuit would be entitled to begin such negotiations themselves.

The Inuit of the Eastern and Central Arctic: The Nunavut[1] Agreement

The Inuit of the central and eastern Arctic region of the Northwest Territories live in small and widely scattered communities. While they are recent newcomers to the Canadian political process, they do possess at least one significant advantage: they constitute 80% of the population within their traditional homelands. As a consequence, they have the numbers by which to exercise a simple democratic control at the local level.

The idea of Nunavut was first proposed in 1976 by the *Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN).* Its main and essential feature was the creation of a new territory with governmental powers equivalent to those of the present governments of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Originally, both Ottawa and Yellowknife resisted the idea and, in 1980, it was decided that the issue of the creation of a new territory should be considered separately from the issue of the Nunavut comprehensive land claim.

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[1] "Nunavut is the Inuit version of Israel" Mary Carpenter.

- This claim was defined and submitted in 1977. It insisted that a new political arrangement had to constitute the basis of the settlement. Subsurface rights were to remain with the Inuit and an amendment was demanded to the Canadian constitution providing for:

> *"the constitutional recognition and continued assurance of the right of the Inuit to exist as an independent culture within Canada."*[2]

- A final agreement on wildlife management was signed in 1981.

However, by 1983, negotiations broke down largely over the questions of Inuit political autonomy and the powers of the *Nunavut Impact Review Board.* The latter body was intended as an agency of review for all matters pertaining to the management of Nunavut's land and natural resources (including all oil, gas and mining proposals). Ottawa wanted the Board to have a purely advisory role while the Inuit demanded it have the power to veto development proposals.

By the spring of 1990, however, an agreement-in-principle had been arrived at. Furthermore, contrary to stated federal policy, the negotiations and agreement involved provisions for Inuit self-government as well as a land claims settlement.

The Northwest Territories would be divided and Nunavut created as a new and separate governmental unit in the east. Officially, the new territory of Nunavut would be a public, as opposed to an aboriginal government. However, given the majority status which the Inuit would enjoy within its borders, Nunavut would, in effect, be a First Nation government.

- In December 1991 the TFN and federal negotiators initialled a final land claims settlement. This accord included a federal promise to produce a binding agreement on the creation of Nunavut.

- Ottawa drew a boundary on the map of the present Northwest Territories and the proposal was submitted to Territorial voters in a plebiscite. The boundary was approved by a slim majority of 54% of the voters in May 1992.

- In the summer of 1992 the TFN and the federal government signed an agreement which committed Ottawa to introduce legislation for the creation of Nunavut at the same time as the final land claims package was presented to parliament for ratification.

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[2] Peter A. Cumming, *Native Land Rights and Northern Development* (1977)

- In November 1992, 10,000 Inuit in the eastern and central Arctic voted by a margin of 69% to accept the final land claims package.

- On June 10th, 1993 two bills of the Canadian parliament received Royal Assent and became law. *The Nunavut Land Claims Act* settled the largest comprehensive land claim in Canadian history while *The Nunavut Act* provided for the creation of the politically separate territory of Nunavut in 1999.

For the Inuit of the eastern and central Arctic, Yellowknife is often seen as remote and foreign a capital as Ottawa. Nunavut offers the promise of local control and the re-assertion of community responsibility.

Apart from the creation of the territory of Nunavut itself, the land claims agreement offers the Inuit of the region the following:

- Title to an approximate 350,000 square kilometres of land (including the mineral rights to some 36,000 square kilometres).

- The right to harvest wildlife and fish throughout the *Nunavut Settlement Area.*

- Capital transfer payments totalling 1.148 billion dollars, payable over the course of 14 years.

- A share of government royalties on gas, oil and mineral rights on Crown lands.

- The establishment of three national parks within the Nunavut settlement area.

- Equal Inuit membership on the public policy boards created by the *Nunavut Land Claims Act.* These include: *The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, The Nunavut Water Board, The Nunavut Impact Review Board, and the Nunavut Planning Commission.*

- An additional 13 million dollars cash for an *Inuit Training Trust Fund.*

- A guarantee to increase Inuit employment in the federal government services sector within the Nunavut Settlement Area and increased access to government contracts within the new territory.

The Dene and Metis of the Mackenzie Valley and Delta Region: Negotiations and Comprehensive Claims

In comparison to the Inuit, the first nations of the Mackenzie region have suffered from a serious handicap in their negotiations with Ottawa: a lack of cultural unity and cohesion of purpose.

The various Dene and Metis peoples of the region are linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse. Where the Inuit share the same language and much that is the same or closely similar in history and culture, the aboriginal peoples of the Mackenzie constitute a sort of mini United Nations.

Until the 1960's competition for benefits and services among the various Dene and Metis communities characterized their common relationship with the Territorial government in Yellowknife. A consciousness of the political importance of unity was first promoted within the region by a group of young native and southern radicals working with the *Company of Young Canadians (CYC)* in the late 60's.

- In 1970 a core of young native activists from the *CYC* formed the nucleus of the *Northwest Territories Indian Brotherhood.* Almost immediately, work began on the formulation of what would eventually become the Dene land claim to the Mackenzie region.

With the *Dene Declaration* in 1973, the idea of a unified and self-governing Dene nation on the Mackenzie was born. The *Declaration* is one of the most evocative, radical and probably the best known statement of an aboriginal claim in Canadian history.

> *"We the Dene of the NWT insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation...The government of Canada is not the government of the Dene. The government of the NWT is not the government of the Dene...there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people..."*

The early 70's saw national attention focused, for the first time, upon the north and the Mackenzie region in particular. The international energy crisis engineered by OPEC had led to the discovery of significant oil and gas deposits in the Arctic and the Mackenzie Valley which was the natural corridor to connect the new energy fields with southern markets.

In 1973 a number of Dene leaders filed a suit claiming aboriginal interest in the Crown lands of the region. The Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories upheld the claim. Since planning for a pipeline through the Mackenzie was well under way, the ruling sent

shock waves through both government circles and southern public opinion. Although the ruling was later struck down by both the Northwest Territories Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada, its shock value had served a real purpose.

- In the spring of 1974 the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry was instituted under the chairmanship of Justice Thomas Berger of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The hearings and the final report of the Inquiry were to prove a watershed in relations between the government of Canada and the first nations of the north.

The Berger Commission did much to alter southern Canadian public opinion in favour of the rights of the native peoples of the north. The influence was also firmly felt in Ottawa and the federal government decided to take a significantly new policy direction.

- In 1976, while still maintaining that *Treaties 8 and 11* applied to the NWT and constituted valid land surrenders, Ottawa decided, nevertheless, to accept a comprehensive land claim for negotiation with the Dene. While rejecting the Dene position that the treaties were invalid because the original signatories had been misled or had failed to understand what was involved, Ottawa recognized that the treaties were abortive due to federal failure to fulfil their terms. No reserves, for example, had been established under the conditions of *Treaty 11* and only one reserve had been established under *Treaty 8.*

At the same time, while rejecting in theory the concept of Metis land claims within the area, negotiations began in practice.

- In 1977 Ottawa accepted a claim from the *Metis Association of the Northwest Territories.* This was done because the Metis constitute "an integral part of the Native community and many of its members would qualify as Dene beneficiaries."

The negotiations that followed proved extremely difficult chiefly because Ottawa insisted that all claims within the region be settled at once and that aboriginal title be "extinguished" by the settlements.

- Between 1978 and 1980, Ottawa cut off federal funding to both the Dene and the Metis organizations for land claims research. Funding was restored in April 1980.

- Negotiations resumed in July 1981. It was, however, not until 1983 that Dene and Metis leaders were able to agree on a common set of negotiating objectives and strategies. Criteria were finally established for eligibility under the terms of an eventual agreement. Joint Metis/Dene negotiations began in 1984.

- In June 1986 a package of understandings and agreements was initialled by Ottawa and the aboriginal community leaders. This package defined what were to be the basic elements of an eventual settlement and included: financial compensation, territories to be reserved for the various First Nations, eligibility for benefits, wildlife and resource management policies.

- The communities were consulted on the package and negotiations resumed in the summer of 1987.

- An agreement in principle was finally signed in September 1988 by all parties.

- By April 1990 a detailed agreement was initialled providing the Dene/Metis with a settlement of 500 million dollars in cash and outright ownership of some 18% of the Mackenzie Valley.

Only three months later, in the summer of 1990, the deal quickly unravelled. At a special assembly of the Dene and Metis, certain community leaders vigorously objected to that part of the agreement which required the surrender of their treaty and aboriginal rights. The Gwich'in chiefs and Metis leaders from the Delta stormed out of the meeting and, a mere twenty years after its birth, the dream of a Dene nation and homeland -- Denendeh -- seemed near.

Soon after, prompted by the Gwich'in and Sahtu Tribal Councils, Ottawa agreed to negotiate *regional* settlements based on the general agreement of 1990. Five regional divisions of the Dene/Metis are recognized for the purposes of negotiation by Ottawa.

1. The Mackenzie Delta or Gwich'in

2. The Sahtu

3. The Deh Cho

4. The Dogrib or North Slave

5. The South Slave

To date, three regional claims have been accepted and two comprehensive land claim settlements concluded.

The Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement of 1991

By 1991, the Gwich'in Dene and Metis of the Mackenzie Delta had concluded an agreement. In September, the settlement was submitted to the vote of the people and accepted by an overwhelming 94% margin. The agreement was passed by the Canadian Parliament and received Royal Assent in December 1992.

Its principal terms are as follows:

- The Gwich'in nation will receive title to 2,331 square kilometres of land in the Northwest Territories (and an additional 1,554 square kilometres across the border in the Yukon). This includes subsurface rights to 2,378 square kilometres in the NWT.
- The payment of $75 million (in 1990 dollars) over a 15 year period.
- A share of the resource royalties payable in the western portion of the Northwest Territories (7.5% of the first $2 million per year, plus 1.5% of the remainder).
- A 15 year subsidy of property taxes on Gwich'in municipal lands.
- Exclusive rights to commercial wildlife activities on Gwich'in lands and preferential rights in the Gwich'in area of settlement.
- A major role in the management of all renewable resources.
- Provision for the continuing negotiation of self-government arrangements to be effected through legislation.

The Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement of 1993

A second regional agreement within the Mackenzie area was concluded and initialled in March, 1993, between the Dene and Metis people of the Sahtu area directly to the south of the Gwich'in.

The selection of settlement lands was completed by June 1993 and a ratification vote held between July 5-8, 1993. The agreement received a high level of support in both communities (85% among the Dene and 99% among the Metis).

The settlement area covers 280,238 square kilometres of territory and involves the five communities of: Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Fort Norman, Deline (formerly Fort Franklin) and Norman Wells.

The principle details of the agreement are as follows:

- The Sahtu Dene and Metis receive private title to 41,437 square kilometres of land. Subsurface rights to 1,1813 square kilometres are included.
- $75 million in compensation over a 15 year period (in 1990 dollars).
- A share of all federal resource royalties in that portion of the NWT that lies south of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and west of the Nunavut Settlement Area.
- Confirmation of the Sahtu Dene and Metis hunting and fishing rights throughout the settlement area.
- Exclusive trapping rights throughout the settlement area.
- Guaranteed Dene and Metis participation in the management of renewable resources within the settlement area.
- Guaranteed participation in land use development and planning within the settlement lands.
- Guaranteed participation in environmental impact studies and reviews within the Mackenzie Valley.
- Guaranteed participation in the regulation of land and water use within the settlement area.

Negotiations of the Comprehensive Claim of the Dogrib Nation

In January of 1992 the First Nation of a third Mackenzie region entered into negotiations for a comprehensive land claims settlement (based on the general agreement of 1990) with the federal government. The talks are on-going and have yet to produce an agreement.

Northwest Territories Bands

Band	Linguistic Group	Language	Culture
Aklavik	Athapaskan	Gwich'in	Makenzie River
Arctic Red River	Athapaskan	Gwich'in	Makenzie River
Dog Rib Rae	Athapaskan	Dogrib	Makenzie River
Fitz/Smith	Athapaskan	Chipewyan	Makenzie River
Fort Franklin	Athapaskan	North Slavey	Makenzie River
Fort Good Hope	Athapaskan	North Slavey	Makenzie River
Fort Liard	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Fort McPherson	Athapaskan	Gwich'in	Makenzie River
Fort Norman			
North Slavey 4	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Fort Providence	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Fort Simpson	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Wrigley	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Hay River	Athapaskan	Slavey	Makenzie River
Resolution	Athapaskan	Chipewyan	Makenzie River
Lutselk'e	Athapaskan	Chipewyan	Makenzie River
Yellowknife (b)	Athapaskan	Yellowknife	Makenzie River