



## *Apology for the Nunavik Dog Slaughter*

The history of Inuit goes far beyond your relationship with those who came and settled on these lands we now call Canada. It is imperative that we as a country recognize that for thousands of years Inuit navigated the Arctic's vast landscapes with unquestionable skill, guided by the wisdom of Elders, community values, and their hardworking dog teams. Long before contact, Inuit had established rich cultures, governance systems, and social infrastructures that centered around community cooperation, adaptability, and respect for the land, sea, and animals. All of which can be seen reflected in Inuit law, knowledge, culture and values.

I am here today to extend a formal apology on behalf of all Canadians and the Government of Canada for Canada's involvement in the Nunavik dog slaughter of the 1950s and 1960s. It is important for me to be here in Kangiqsujaq, Nunavik for this apology, to be with you in communities where it happened. The dog slaughter occurred across Nunavik, spreading grief and devastation from the brutality. For this, words are not enough to express the sorrow and regret we feel. The actions and inactions that led to the mass killing of the qimmiit (sled dogs) inflicted deep pain and hardship on Inuit families that none should have had to endure.

I have heard from Elders of the horror of the mass killing of the dogs that occurred in this community. The qimmiit were shot, burned in a pile on the ice in front of the owners and the remains were left there for the winter, forcing the community to be reminded daily of the violence and trauma of losing their dogs. The inhumanity of these actions is difficult to comprehend today. We are here today not only to recognize this injustice but to renew our commitment to reconciliation, healing, and the protection of the Inuit way of life.

By the end of the dog slaughter, only a few qimmiit remained in Nunavik, and many communities lost all their dogs. The qimmiit were a crucial and deeply significant part of Inuit life, allowing for hunters to provide for their families and communities, for

mobility across the land and sea, and to provide safety and protection. When the dogs were killed, Inuit were abruptly forced into settlements, adopting a non-Inuk way of life that severed their vital connection to the animals, land, and sea, as well as the traditions that had been passed down for as long as can be remembered. This caused immense pain and trauma, as Inuit lost their livelihood, and endured immeasurable changes to their culture and society, which can still be felt to this day.

Through the profound words of Inuit Elders, youth, community members, and leaders, I have heard of the deep pain that the dog slaughter caused and continues to cause your communities. Families who lost their dogs still carry the pain with them. The harm has been passed on to the younger generations through intergenerational trauma and has contributed significantly to the mental health crisis in Nunavik.

The Federal Government takes responsibility for its role in the dog slaughter. When it started in the 1950s, the killing of the dogs was done under Federal authority, although Federal officials were aware that the dogs were essential to Inuit for traveling to camps and for hunting. Within Inuit communities in the 1950s, the RCMP were utilized to police and enforce federal policies that disrupted traditional ways of life and contributed to the systemic marginalization of Inuit. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Federal officials knew that the dog slaughter was occurring and allowed it to continue, aware that Inuit way of life, health, and wellbeing depended on the dogs.

This was a horrendous betrayal by those who were tasked to support and live in partnership with Inuit and who were present in your communities. This has created immense distrust toward the Federal Government, including the police. More harm was caused by federal responses that did not fully acknowledge the role of the Federal

Government, including the 2006 RCMP report that has been particularly painful for your communities. RCMP are here in community with us today to show their support of this apology and to affirm their commitment to rebuilding trust, fostering reconciliation efforts, and building relationships with Inuit.

This formal apology is one of the steps the Federal Government is taking to reconcile that relationship in an effort to rebuild the trust with you.

This apology should have been made a long time ago. Starting in 1999, Inuit leaders, especially Makivik President, Mr. Aatami, have called for this apology. It should not have taken decades for Canada to apologize to Nunavik Inuit for the role the Federal Government played in the dispossession and devastating loss of the sled dogs, who acted as your companions and kin. We are also sorry that because we waited, many whose lives were affected by the dog slaughter are not with us to hear this apology. It is in their memory and leadership that Inuit have maintained a strong position for this apology as well as the stewardship over Inuit Nunangat.

There is no place for these actions and inactions and this way of thinking in the Government of Canada's relationship with Inuit. The Inuit-Crown relationship should be based on equality, respect, understanding, and trust and support the self-determination of Inuit and we are committed to collaborating with Inuit on this basis, with the intention of building a better future together.

On behalf of the government of Canada and of all the Canadians, I am sorry. Please forgive us. Isumajjunnaitaugumavugut.

I am sorry for the government's actions and inactions that caused the dog slaughter and allowed it to continue for so many years. Canada apologies for the pain and harm the dog slaughter caused to your communities for generations.

In my time, I have been fortunate enough to meet and listen to Inuit leaders and Elders who have emphasized to me that Inuit are resilient, determined, and have persevered through this devastation and have always been adaptable to their environment. Because of your strength, Inuit have not lost their language, culture and identity. Hunting and the land are still integral to who you are. Being on the land and in relation to the animals are still integral to who Inuit are. Since the dog slaughter, Inuit-led initiatives have worked to reintroduce and helped bring back the sled dogs to your communities. These initiatives have supported dog owners, preserved generational knowledge, and enabled hunters to continue practicing traditional ways of life on the land. One of the longest running Inuit-led initiatives is the Ivakkak race, which Makivik has been running for over 20 years, as a celebration of dog sledding and a demonstration of Inuit resilience and strength.

Inuit should never have been left to bear the burden of addressing the pain and suffering caused by these forced atrocities alone. It is long overdue for the Federal Government to step forward, and be an active partner in bringing meaningful solutions to heal these wounds. This is a first step of many in a resolution. The Government of Canada and Makivik will continue to work in partnership towards reconciliation.

Inuit have always shared a profound connection to the land and to qimmiit for as long as history has been recorded—first through oral histories and, later, through written records. This bond is integral to Inuit culture, heritage, and way of life. The Government of Canada recognizes and honors this enduring relationship and is committed to building a future together, founded on mutual respect and equality.

Nakurmiik. Thank you.

