

Nunatsiavut
kavamanga



Nunatsiavut
Government

News Release

(Nain) December 1, 2005 Nunatsiavut Government Comes Into Effect

Today Nunatsiavut Government came into effect. The current Board of the Labrador Inuit Association became the transitional government which will be in place until an election is held. This “effective date” marks the transition of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA) into a legal and constitutional reality.

Equivalent to the provincial House of Assembly or Parliament’s House of Commons, the Jens Haven School gym in Nain was transformed into the first ‘house’ for Nunatsiavut Government. A new assembly building will be constructed in Hopedale to house the legislative centre for Nunatsiavut.

Nunatsiavut, which means “our beautiful land,” came into being today during a special meeting of the LIA board. The meeting, which was open to special guests and to the public, was preceded by prayers led first by an Inuit Elder then by an Inuit Youth. During the session, a resolution passed declaring the Nunatsiavut Inuit Constitution in effect. Soon after this, LIA Directors took their planned positions in the new Transitional Nunatsiavut Assembly.

LIA President William Andersen III was sworn in as the Transitional President of Nunatsiavut. LIA Vice President and Chief Negotiator Tony Andersen was sworn in as Nunatsiavut Transitional First Minister, and LIA Treasurer Gary Baikie was sworn in as Nunatsiavut Transitional Treasurer.

The adjournment of the special LIA meeting was marked by traditional Inuit performances from Nunatsiavut Drum Dancers and Throat singers and the choirs of Nain and Hopedale. They sang the Canadian and Nunatsiavut National Anthems during the laying of the Canadian flag by Inuit RCMP officers and the Nunatsiavut flag by the Rising Youth Council. Inuit government officials, youth and elders watched the events from the gallery.

The historic First Session of the Nunatsiavut Transitional Assembly followed with President Andersen declaring the assembly in session. Government business to initiate Nunatsiavut began with the introduction of Bills for the Nunatsiavut Transitional Assembly and the Nunatsiavut Constitution. Then Ruth Flowers of Hopedale was elected as the first Speaker of Nunatsiavut Assembly.

There was break in the legislative process as the Assembly unanimously agreed with President Andersen's invitation to the Honourable Danny Williams, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, to address the Assembly. Although it is rare for heads of other governments to be invited to address legislative assemblies, the Nunatsiavut Government wanted to acknowledge the continuing partnership with the provincial and federal governments. Senator William Rompkey was also invited to address the Assembly on behalf of Canada. Prevented by weather from making it to Nain, Premier Williams and Senator Rompkey addressed the gathering from the videoconference centre at the Labrador Health Centre in Happy Valley—Goose Bay.

Also originally expected in Nain for a day of ceremony, performance and community feasts were Deputy Premier Tom Rideout, who is also Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, Tom Osborne, Minister of Environment and Conservation, Paul Shelley, Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs, and leaders from other Inuit territories and organizations. Opposition leaders Gerry Reid and Jack Harris, along with Labrador MHAs John Hickey, Randy Collins and Wally Andersen, an Inuk whose district includes most of the Labrador Inuit lands, were invited. Other special guests included Past Presidents and Past Vice Presidents of the LIA, representatives of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Parks Canada, the RCMP, other Aboriginal leaders, and representatives from the federal and provincial governments. All viewed the Nain proceedings by webcast at the Royal Canadian Legion in Happy Valley—Goose Bay.

The Nunatsiavut government business continued in the afternoon with the passing of several Bills related to the Nunatsiavut Civil Service, and matters of procedure, taxation and revenue.

While the main ceremony took place in Nain, community celebrations occurred simultaneously in the Inuit communities of Hopedale, Postville, Rigolet and Makkovik as well as among Inuit in North West River, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, St. John's and other communities.

The Nunatsiavut Government will operate through consensus rather than the adversarial party system. It will observe federal and provincial laws and will continue to work with both levels of government especially in health, justice and education. The Nunatsiavut Government will, however, in time, take greater control of these areas of policy. The theme is one of mutual co-operation with the province and with Canada as the Labrador Inuit continue to progress towards self-government.

Crucially, Inuit language and culture will be added to the school curriculum, and steps will be taken to enable Inuit to become teachers, healthcare workers, administrators and decision-makers. Nunatsiavut Government will set guidelines for resource use such as hunting, fishing and mining but with input from the federal government should over-harvesting become an issue. The aim is for the Labrador Inuit to continue to build capacity for setting environmental goals, and to ultimately manage conservation in the newly established Inuit territory of the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve.

One of the main tasks for the Nunatsiavut Government is to prepare for the transition to an elected Assembly within the near future. Though a vital and momentous step, December 1 is in many ways part of an ongoing process.

Nunatsiavut Government represents 5,300 Inuit and Kabloonangajuit of Labrador, and is responsible for advancing the aboriginal, constitutional, democratic, social and human rights of Labrador Inuit. For more information, visit www.nunatsiavut.com

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