

## What the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* means to me...

*Each year, students attending the Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) college program in Ottawa spend eight months studying the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), contemporary issues, Inuit-government relations, Inuit history, Inuktitut and English. As the year progresses the story of Nunavut begins to come together in their minds. The first year students were asked to write about what the NLCA means to them. A selection of these contributions is shared with you here.*

In my mind, the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* means a lot to me. Our ancestors lived off the land in their traditional way of life, without the use of industrial tools or technologies. In the past Inuit helped each other by fighting for what they want to see in the future. It is a big thing that the Inuit signed the *NLCA* and now have their own rights and that we will not forget our culture and our language.

In my heart, it still means a lot for me not to forget the Inuit that signed the *NLCA*. Our ancestors fought to get their own land, to keep their culture alive and strong. We do not want to forget those leaders that fought for us. The *NLCA* holds an important place in my mind and heart as it represents the fact that we have a free country and should enjoy the same freedoms as our ancestors.

— *Linda Airut, Igloodik*



Before the *NLCA*, I can only imagine how Inuit lived. The Inuit lived a peaceful life before the whalers, traders and missionaries came, and they were able to live freely. Shortly after the Europeans came, Inuit were treated as if they were not human beings. They lost their language and culture. Inuit were forced to give up almost everything because non-Inuit said their culture was useless and that it would never be recognized.

With everything Inuit have been through in their history I think the *NLCA* is the heart of a working body. Without it, Inuit would not be here right now. We now have rights that are protected by law. Even if we do not fully speak our language or live the way that we used to, we now have rights that we should be very proud of. We can now proudly speak our language and have our culture recognized. We

can hunt with pride and show the world we do exist with our unique culture and traditional ways of surviving in the Arctic. The *NLCA*, to Inuit, is the outcome of their hard work. It is, in a way, an apology for how we were treated in the past. This gift from our leaders should be, and is, very important to Inuit in Nunavut.

— *Crystal Tatty, Rankin Inlet*



The *NLCA* is important to me for so many reasons. Through contact with Qallunaat we lost our culture, language and beliefs. Inuit finally stood up and fought for our rights. Without the *NLCA* our lives would be very different. The *NLCA* allows me to continue learning about my culture and traditions.

The *NLCA* means that we have a relationship with the Canadian government. It is like a contract that should not change as Inuit spent several years building the agreement to benefit Inuit and preserve our language and rights. The Qallunaat took over our land and treated it as if we were not even there. Through the hard work of our strong leaders we are now no longer being ignored. They fought for this agreement so now our voices can be heard and we can live with freedom.

— *Irma Joy Voisey, Whale Cove*



The *NLCA* is a part of history that we have to remember. Inuit got together from all over Canada to listen, discuss, and make decisions on what was going on in relation to their rights. Inuit today would not have the freedom if it were not for those brave Inuit standing up together against the government of Canada. The *NLCA* is important to me because it is the reason we can still harvest, speak our language, learn our culture, and pass all this on from generation to generation.

There have been many negotiations between the government and Aboriginal peoples. But the *NLCA* is the biggest agreement ever to be signed by any government about Aboriginal rights. Inuit fought long and tough throughout the negotiations. For that I am very thankful, proud, happy and a bit



Photo credit: Northern Public Affairs

sad as some peoples lives were greatly affected by the agreement. They made it happen so that present and future Nunavut Inuit can have equal rights to the land we lived on for thousands of years.

— *Jennifer Ullulaq, Gjoa Haven*



I am unique. I am a mixture of Inuit and Chipewyan. I have the traditions and culture of two peoples. I am tied to the *NLCA* by my father's ancestry, although my mother as a Chipewyan has similar values. Both cultures are completely different. For First Nations people, long hair is a representation of strength, pride, beauty, and identity. Within the braid, it ties together three main things: identity, sense of wellbeing, and integrity. It is the breaking point of the connection to the culture and traditions.

For me, The *NLCA* is a symbol in the same way that long hair has an importance amongst the First Nations. The *NLCA* braids together the strength, pride, and beauty of protected lands, water, and wildlife. The *NLCA* ensures the culture and traditions are preserved and carried out in future generations. It keeps the integrity of the people and our right to the land existing. Without the *NLCA* it would have been the same affect as cutting off the braid of a First Nations man or woman. It would be like stripping the identity of Inuit, and their sense of protection to the land, water, and wildlife. It could mean that the preservation of the culture and traditions would be lost. I have two traditions and cultures. I have two braids, two to protect, and two to represent with pride and beauty.

— *Savannah Anagnaluak, Kugluktuk*



The *NLCA* is important to me for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons is that you see other ethnic groups fighting and struggling to keep what they want protected. They do not have the freedom to do what they want on what is rightfully theirs. I have no idea how our Inuit elders had the patience

to wait, get an education, and fight for twenty years without changing their grounds. The *NLCA* gives me the security of knowing that my children and I are part of something.

The *NLCA* was, and is, one of the biggest treaties ever signed and is the biggest territory to be divided without violence. Because of the *NLCA* I, and all Inuit, have the right to say what goes on on our land. We have a say in what happens to our wildlife that many Inuit depend on. I am thankful as an Inuk because if anything happens to the place that I call home, I have the right to get compensation because of the *NLCA*. However, I would never take the compensation over my home.

— *Neoma Kipomee-Cox, Iqaluit*



The *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* is important for all Inuit in Nunavut. The *NLCA* is an agreement between the Inuit and the Canadian government, which allows Inuit hunting rights, the right to manage wildlife, access to benefits, and land rights. It helps to keep our culture and language strong by protecting our Inuit rights. I find this important for my family and myself as an Inuk. Our people fought hard for our rights and had to learn very quickly about the government laws and how the system works. I am forever grateful for the amazing and strong leaders who fought for our rights. It is very inspirational to learn how much a person can do for themselves, their people, and their territory. I am glad to be at a school that is teaching me about the history of how Nunavut was created. It has helped me understand the *NLCA* in greater depth and how it affects me as an Inuk. Before Nunavut Sivuniksavut I did not realize how important the land claim was and I am now much more passionate about our history and future. So, to me, the *NLCA* is a big part of who we are as Inuit. I feel very lucky to be a Nunavummiuk as we get to keep our beautiful culture and have benefits of being Inuk.

— *Kaneena Kusugak, Rankin Inlet* ●