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Commissioner's Address

**At the Opening of the Second Session of the Fifth Legislative
Assembly of Nunavut**

Delivered by:

THE HONOURABLE NELLIE T. KUSUGAK

COMMISSIONER OF NUNAVUT

March 20, 2018

Elders, Premier, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, honoured guests, and all Nunavummiut. Welcome to the opening of the Second Session of the Fifth Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

I am pleased to be here before you to deliver the first Commissioner's address of this Assembly and our new government.

This is an opportunity to look back at where we have come from and reflect on where we are going, as people and as a territory.

Nunavummiut have put their trust in five Assemblies. Each Assembly has outlined its vision for Nunavut and its priorities for action.

Our First and Second Assemblies described hopes and plans for Nunavut, along with *Pinasuaqtavut* - that which we've set out to do.

The Third Assembly declared its belief in the vision of Nunavut and called upon all of us – *Tamapta* – to work together to achieve it.

The Fourth Assembly focused on stepping forward together – *Sivumut Abluqta* – to make Nunavut a better place for our children, grandchildren, and all Nunavummiut.

As we look back, we can see that the visions and the priorities of each successive government are related and beginning to tell a story about our people and our land in these times.

Our hopes and dreams for Nunavut remain intact, and are inspired by those who envisioned our territory and negotiated the Agreement that established it. Each government works in its own way at keeping that vision alive – and realizing it.

The priorities of each government are anchored in the current realities of Nunavut. Our challenges are complex and difficult to resolve. Many of our opportunities as a territory are long-term in nature. Each Assembly focuses its priorities on the progress it intends to make during its term.

And finally, each government affirms the Inuit societal values that will continue to guide its efforts.

Our Fifth Assembly recognizes the accomplishments of previous Assemblies and is honoured to build on what has been achieved.

The Assembly comes to this task with a bold and positive vision for our territory

This vision respects our Elders and calls upon traditional knowledge-holders to help us remember the past and use it to shape our future. It looks ahead to a time when our positive-minded youth take full advantage of opportunities for education, travel, and employment. It envisions an inclusive society in which people and communities contribute to a positive future for all.

In this vision, Nunavut is known and valued in Canada and internationally as a distinct territory, with a different environment, a vibrant Inuit culture and language, a unique way of governing, and a distinctive perspective on issues and opportunities in the Arctic.

We know where we want to go. The name of the Fifth Assembly's mandate – *Turaaqtavut* – will be the guide to where we are headed.

There is much work ahead of this government over the next four years.

Our government is committed to action on five practical priorities that will make a difference in the lives of Nunavummiut.

Inuusivut

We will work towards the well-being and self-reliance of our people and our communities through *Inuusivut*.

Nunavut is a vast territory, comprising 20% of Canada's land mass. Our population continues to grow rapidly. More than 30% of our population is under age 15 and the number of seniors has doubled since 2004.

Our people and communities are widely dispersed across our land. Our ancestors thrived by making use of all that was around them, and by working together, in partnership, to ensure that everyone was well taken care of. Today, individuals, families, communities, and government share a

responsibility to encourage and support self-reliance, which is the foundation of our way of life.

If it weren't for our ancestors, we would not be here. Those who came before us had the knowledge and skills to ensure that their descendants would thrive. It is due to their resilience and ongoing adaptation that we are here today, in this land we now call Nunavut.

Our government values our Elders and is making it a priority to meet more of their needs for care in the territory.

Food and housing are costly, and our housing stock is insufficient to meet the needs of our population. Our government will respond to the needs of Nunavummiut for safe and affordable housing and food security.

Too many of our people are sent out of Nunavut for treatment or ongoing care that could be provided in the territory. Our government will enhance the health care services that are available in the territory.

We want Nunavummiut to build good lives for themselves and treat one another with respect. Our homes and communities must be safe places for our youngest and most vulnerable Nunavummiut to grow, thrive and succeed. Our government will increase support for community-based justice and healing programs to address family violence and sexual abuse.

Inuit have always been strong, resilient and adaptive people. We have used *piliriqatigiinniq* to overcome even the harshest conditions and most challenging circumstances. Our ancestors left us lessons that can still help us in our lives today. We are making progress on improving the outcomes of mental health, addictions, and family counselling, and are taking action to prevent suicide. Our government will continue to use both contemporary and traditional counselling systems to achieve even better outcomes.

Pivaallirutivut

We will develop our infrastructure and economy in ways that support a positive future for our people, our communities, and our land through *Pivaallirutivut*.

Our infrastructure is aging and does not meet the needs of our growing population. We need creative and willing partners to address our most critical infrastructure needs. Our government will invest with partners in infrastructure that enhances the well-being of individuals and communities, including facilities for Elder care and addictions in the territory.

We must create opportunities to connect Nunavummiut to one another and to the rest of Canada, so that we feel that we are part of this country and that our voices are heard. We believe there is an opportunity for a modern-day nation-building exercise in Nunavut. Our government will look for opportunities to invest with partners to meet our current infrastructure needs, and explore opportunities to partner on other major projects such as roads, telecommunications, and transportation.

Nunavut's economy is growing but continues to be under-developed. Our government will support diverse economic opportunities to encourage community self-reliance and provide more local employment.

Our territory is rich in renewable and non-renewable resources. However, Arctic ecosystems are fragile and vulnerable to climate change. Our government will develop and manage our resources in a sustainable manner to ensure that Nunavummiut can enjoy a strong relationship with our land for generations to come.

Sivummuaqpalliajjutivut

We will provide education and training that prepares children, youth, and adult learners for positive contributions to society and for meaningful employment through *Sivummuaqpalliajjutivut*.

As a former educator, this priority is very close to my heart.

As a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, I know that learning begins very early in life. Our government will support learning and development in early childhood through affordable and accessible daycare.

Our education system must help to provide a strong foundation for our young people and prepare them to make valuable contributions to our society. To achieve this, we must work together to shape education policies

and practices that will improve education outcomes, and strengthen Inuit culture, heritage and language.

We have listened to Nunavummiut about the need for stronger Inuktitut in schools, our government and our society. We need to support and encourage one another to go forward, working together as government, educators, district education authorities, communities and families. Our government will amend the Education Act and the Inuit Language Protection Act to ensure quality schooling and improve student outcomes.

Nunavummiut have increasing choice in employment. Despite these opportunities, many people are dependent on social assistance, under-employed, or face barriers to entering the workforce. Our government will offer local skills and trades training to increase the participation of Inuit and Nunavummiut in the workforce, reduce the territory's dependence on imported labour, invest in supports such as child care, and support employment for people with disabilities.

Education is required to take advantage of many employment opportunities in the territory, including many jobs in the public service. Our government will improve the supports provided to post-secondary students and to the post-secondary programs that develop the knowledge and skills we need in Nunavut.

As the territory's largest employer, the public service must compete with other employers within and outside Nunavut to attract and retain skilled employees. Our government will provide workplace education and training for public servants, with an emphasis on increasing Inuit employment and developing strong Inuit leaders.

Inuunivut

We will strengthen Nunavut as a distinct territory in Canada and the world through *Inuunivut*.

Nunavut was created in 1999 under a comprehensive land claim agreement that was envisioned and negotiated by Inuit. Our territory is

unique in its vast Arctic geography, its majority indigenous population, and the model of governance established by the Nunavut Agreement.

Our public government must respond to the needs of all Nunavummiut, while honouring Inuit culture and values; protecting and promoting the Inuit language; and respecting Inuit aspirations for Nunavut. Our government will ensure that programs and services are more effective and relevant through Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Inuit Societal Values within legislation and policy.

The Inuit language is protected under legislation. There is no other jurisdiction in Canada that provides this level of statutory protection to an indigenous language. It contributes to Nunavut's distinct qualities. Our government will continue to enable the Inuit language as the working language of the public service and strengthen the foundations for a fully functional, bilingual society in Inuktut and English or French.

Katujjiqatigiinnivut

We will work in partnership to advance the goals and aspirations of Nunavummiut through *Katujjiqatigiinnivut*.

Our ancestors made decisions by consensus, and worked in partnership and through collaboration to ensure each other's well-being. These values and principles informed their way of life, and still influence and add meaning to ours today.

Through *katujjiqatigiinnivut*, we will work together to realize the vision for Nunavut that led to the creation of our territory and government.

Our government is committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Nunavut Agreement.

The Nunavut Agreement requires the territorial government to work in partnership. Our government will establish strategic partnerships with Inuit organizations, the federal government, and the private sector to meet the needs of our communities.

The public service has matured since 1999, however, our government must continue to develop capacity and capability while fulfilling our obligations under Article 23 to achieve a representative public service. Our government will refocus human resources policies and programs on Inuit employment at all levels of the public service.

At the same time, the territory's public government must operate efficiently, effectively, and responsibly. Our government will ensure that the public service operates in a fiscally responsible manner that supports action on these priorities and meets the needs of Nunavummiut.

This is ***Turaaqtavut*** – what we are aiming to achieve. It is a very full agenda for the next four years. The budgets of our government will further outline the specific steps we will be taking to fulfill our mandate priorities.

Cooperation and collaboration will bring about the improvements we want as Nunavummiut. Partnership and determination will take us forward and secure a strong future for Nunavut as a distinct territory in Canada and the world.