
Political Life

In addition to being Canadian citizens, the Inuit claim special rights as aboriginal peoples. Their leaders have stated to Parliament "the Aboriginal peoples of Canada interacted with Imperial representatives very much like 'nations' in the international sense. This status as 'nations' within Canada vests in us rights not held by others who later immigrated to Canada". Canada has dealt with claims of this kind to aboriginal rights by two political processes. Starting in 1973, the federal government agreed to negotiate settlements in areas like the Arctic where an aboriginal group has claimed that an aboriginal interest in the land, as demonstrated by continued use and occupancy, had not been extinguished. The second process was established in 1982 by the Constitution Act, which requires that a series of meetings of provincial premiers and the prime minister be held to define and clarify the meaning of "existing aboriginal rights" as recognized and affirmed by that Act. Both processes continue. As well, the federal government is committed, as a matter of policy, to greater self-government at the local and regional level for all native people.

Inuit claims agreements

Two Inuit groups have reached final agreement with the federal government over their aboriginal claims: the Inuit of northern Quebec (in 1975), and the Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic (in 1984). In the first case, the province of Quebec was a party to the agreement. Negotiations are under way in the case of the Inuit of Labrador, and the Inuit of the Northwest Territories not already included in the Western Arctic agreement.

These agreements are intended to provide various benefits in exchange for aboriginal land title, such as the following:

- surface title to large areas of land,
- sub-surface rights to a portion of the land selected,
- hunting, fishing, and trapping rights on remaining Crown land, and
- monetary compensation.

The claims agreements also provide for Inuit involvement in land and resource management. Federal claims policy is currently under review and the nature of benefits which may be negotiated may change.

Organizations and activity

The period of rapid social change in the Inuit homeland of northern Canada after the Second World War created tremendous stresses in Inuit life. Although Inuit are a population majority across one-third of