

line across Canada's north were built. Government services, mining exploration and development increased and, more recently, large oil and gas reserve discoveries have brought thousands of southerners into the North.

It was during this latter period that the Canadian government recognized the Inuit as full citizens and began providing health, education and other social services. This led to a greatly increased government presence and presaged the move of the Inuit to a smaller number of larger, more stable communities with schools, churches, government offices and stores.

### **The Inuit Today**

Hunting and fishing still provide many Inuit with fresh protein. Some sealing and trapping activities continue, but anti-sealing and anti-trapping crusades have diminished the value of these once lucrative industries. The practices, however, remain part of Inuit culture, provide most of the food supply and supplement many incomes.

The Inuit's economic base is much more diversified today than in past years. There has been great demand for the internationally renowned Inuit carvings and prints. Generally sold through Inuit co-operatives, they provide a steady source of income to many communities.

Inuit community growth has provided jobs in community services, service and development industries, and government. Some Inuit, particularly in the western Arctic, are finding employment in the oil and gas industry and related service enterprises.

Many communities are too remote to allow the Inuit reasonable access to major labour markets. The problem of further diversifying the economy and providing meaningful employment for the young and growing Inuit population is a major challenge.

### **Political Awakening**

Traditionally, the Canadian Inuit had few formal political structures. They remained largely outside the political systems that were introduced with the modernization of the North. For example, the Inuit had no vote in Canadian elections until 1962.

Concerned with regaining greater control over their lives and their future, the Inuit have become much more politically active. Most communities are now

incorporated and governed by elected councils, similar to those in municipalities across Canada. In the Northwest Territories, where the Inuit and other aboriginal peoples form a majority of the population, Inuit are well represented in the Legislative Assembly and at the territorial ministerial level. In Canada's Parliament, Inuit members now sit in both the House of Commons and the Senate. Notable among the political organizations formed, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada speaks with a united voice on major economic, environmental and political issues of concern to the Inuit.

Canada's Inuit have also joined those of Greenland, Alaska and the Soviet Union to form the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an international body addressing the key issues and concerns of the entire arctic world.

Discussions, under way for several years, could lead to a new, predominantly Inuit, territory in Canada's North comprising roughly the eastern half of the present Northwest Territories. The new territory would be called Nunavut and would hold the same degree of political and economic sovereignty as the other northern territories.

### **Land Claims**

As the North became more developed, conflicts over land ownership and rights inevitably emerged. Usually, land not privately owned belongs to the Government of Canada. The Inuit believe they have a historic claim to large tracts of land by virtue of their occupancy and use over many centuries.

During the last decade, the government and the Inuit have been involved in negotiations aimed at achieving comprehensive land claims settlements. These settlements involve the exchange of the Inuit's historic claim for more concrete rights and benefits clearly defined in law.

The benefits include title to specific land areas, cash settlements and protection of traditional hunting, fishing and trapping rights. The settlements also provide for greater Inuit participation in decision making relating to economic development and environmental protection in their region.

Claims settlements have been successfully reached with Inuit groups in northern Quebec and in the western Arctic. The Tungavik Federation of Nunavut was formed to negotiate the

claim of Inuit in the eastern and central Arctic, and negotiations are well under way. Negotiations have also begun with the Labrador Inuit.

### **Environmental Protection**

Throughout the modern development of the Canadian North, the Inuit have been leaders in urging caution and concern for the effects of human activity on the arctic environment. They have a deeply rooted tradition of living in harmony with the land and with nature, understanding better than most the northern ecological system's fragility.

Canadians have become aware that the North is no longer a remote, pristine area immune from industrialization's effects. Contaminants caused by activities thousands of kilometres away have shown up in the environment and in the Inuit diet. In the years ahead, climate change and phenomena such as the "greenhouse effect" can profoundly change northern life.

The Inuit of Canada are working with the territorial and national governments to study and better understand developments and seek solutions to the problems posed.

### **Looking Ahead**

Canada's Inuit have shown remarkable resiliency in withstanding, absorbing and adapting to the onslaught of a very different culture without losing either their traditional values or their desire to remain a distinct and self-reliant society.

They have, in recent years, gained a measure of political control. The final settlement of all land claims will provide a more certain base from which they can plan their future.

The transition is not yet complete. As with all cultures, change is evolutionary and many challenges lie ahead. One of the most important of these is to establish a more stable economic base so that the Inuit sense of self-reliance can be maintained. Future generations of young Inuit can then continue to live and lead productive lives in the traditional land of their people.

