



*"Old Jenny" with rabbit she has snared, Mayo area, 1930s*

*Photo: Courtesy of the Yukon Archives, Claude Tidd Collection*

# Inuit Women

## *Equality and Leadership*

by Martha Flaherty

*Pauktuutit, le seul organisme national qui représente les femmes Inuit du Canada, a soulevé d'importantes questions politiques, sociales et économiques pour les femmes Inuit. L'article qui suit est un passage du discours présidentiel adressé aux délégué(e)s lors de la réunion générale annuelle de Pauktuutit de février 1994 tenue à Iqaluit dans les territoires du Nord-Ouest.*

*Since its creation in 1984, Pauktuutit, the only national Canadian organization representing Inuit women, has addressed a wide range of political, social, and economic issues of importance to Inuit women. Following are excerpts from the President's address to delegates at Pauktuutit's 1994 Annual General Meeting held in Iqaluit, Northwest Territories from February 21 to 24, 1994.*

Every year, Inuit women gather to discuss the issues and problems facing us in the North. For the past five years, discussions have focused on family violence. We have tackled this problem by speaking about our pain, offering each other support and understanding, holding workshops, sharing information on how various communities are addressing family violence, and, through our resolutions, outlining the actions we wish to see taken. Pauktuutit has published a number of books and newsletters aimed at increasing public awareness of family violence and offering information on how to work towards alleviating the problem. In a sense, Pauktuutit has become the Inuit public's conscience on family violence.

This year, we will continue to address family violence through a continuation of the Healing Workshop we began last year in Goose Bay. But we are also making an effort to focus on our strengths as Inuit women. This annual general meeting includes workshops on Inuit clothing production and a fashion show to promote the work of traditional Inuit clothing producers.

The traditional clothing produced by Inuit women is unique in the world. It is a visible statement of the creativity and practicality of Inuit women. Women have clothed their families for centuries, not only keeping their loved ones warm but doing so with skill and beauty. Today, Inuit women continue to produce beautiful clothing. This is an economic activity which women can undertake from their homes, providing goods for their family or selling the products of their labour for money. We are proud of the skills of Inuit women clothing producers, artists, and craftswomen, and we believe that their work should be included in definitions of community economic development.

Unfortunately, women's work is often forgotten or discounted in the economic development arena. For example, the Wildlife Hunters Income Support Program negotiated as part of the Nunavut Land Claim provides hunters with money to finance the hunt, but it does not include money for the women who work with the skins. This is a good program for hunters and we support it, but it is also an example of how women's work can be excluded or ignored. Similar problems exist with government economic development programs which tend to support large scale projects rather than the small, home-based businesses preferred by many women.

Real barriers exist which inhibit the participation of Inuit women in the northern economy: lack of child care; difficulty in accessing start-up funds for small businesses; lack of training; and the exclusion of many Inuit women from economic development initiatives. Economic development is one of many issues that Pauktuutit deals with on an ongoing basis. Others include family violence, a wide range of health, social, and family issues, justice, and alcohol and drug abuse.

I have to speak about some of the things which are important to me personally, as well as things which I have come to feel strongly about as President of Pauktuutit. I see an urgent need to open up our organizations to Inuit youth. We are all keenly aware of the problems facing youth but if we are going to solve these problems, it is absolutely essential that young people become involved.

When I was younger, I never imagined myself in the position I am in today. I was so afraid to speak and I had so little self-esteem that if someone even looked at me I would turn my head. During my first year as President of Pauktuutit, I was very nervous every time I had to speak in public, and it is only because I had the opportunity to speak about issues I care about that I overcame my shyness. I would like to encourage young people across the North to take every available opportunity to begin speaking about the issues that concern you and the things you care about. I also encourage Inuit organizations to provide those opportunities.

Last year, at Pauktuutit's Annual General Meeting in Goose Bay, a young woman spoke to us about sexual abuse and the way communities can turn on victims who decide to report abuse to the police. She spoke about the lack of support and lack of understanding she encountered in the schools, the church, social services, and among Elders. She was not used to speaking in public, and it was only her conviction that something must be done about the problem which gave her the courage to speak. She told us how she felt compelled to speak out so that those even younger than her would not be abused and then silenced as she had

been. She was so young, yet she had already lived through many years of pain.

This young woman's courage touched my heart. Even though she is young, I learned a great deal from her. She gave me hope and encouragement and I know there are many other young women and men who also possess great courage and conviction. We have to make room for them to speak to us through creating safe environments and the opportunity to become involved, and we need to listen to youth, not criticize and discount them. Community leaders, mayors, church leaders, parents, teachers, and Inuit organizations must all take time to listen to the

---

*Real barriers exist which inhibit the participation of Inuit women in the northern economy: lack of child care; difficulty in accessing start-up funds; exclusion from economic development initiatives.*

---

young women and men who will one day be our leaders.

Speaking publicly about sensitive and painful issues is difficult, but we must also be aware of the need to move beyond words. We must also act. Pauktuutit has been a vehicle for speaking out on social problems, but if we are going to move beyond speech, we cannot act alone. Men, women, youth, Elders, and all of the organizations which represent us must take on more responsibility for dealing with the social problems facing Inuit society. Dealing with social problems is not women's work alone. It is time to widen the circle, to bring men, youth, and Elders more actively into our efforts to address these issues. At the same time, women must become more involved in issues which are normally seen as falling outside women's realm of expertise—issues such as land claims, economic development, and the negotiation and implementation of self-government. We will be a healthier, more balanced society when we are able to count on the skills and insights of a wider range of people in dealing with any issue, whether it be economic, political, or social in nature.

In my travels, I sometimes hear people say that Pauktuutit only deals with women's issues and that we do nothing for men. I do not see it this way. Pauktuutit represents Inuit women and we deal with the broad range of issues that women identify as important. Women are concerned about the physical, emotional, and economic well-being of their families, their communities, and Inuit society. These concerns necessarily include men, children, youth, and Elders—as well as women. The issues we deal with, such as violence against women, affect every one of us, and finding solutions to this problem would benefit families and communities, women, children, and men. Surely, the men who resort to violence will be happier and more emotionally balanced once they have conquered their need to strike out at loved ones. Once we are able to put

an end to family violence in the North, our society will be composed of healthier individuals with the strength and personal resources to contribute to the well-being of our communities. Everyone benefits. But, in the same vein, everyone must contribute to finding workable solutions and making them happen.

To those men who believe that Pauktuutit is trying to take their rights away, I would say that equality never diminishes anyone. We do not seek power over men, but rather, equality with men, respect, fairness, and openness. We would like our daughters to grow up knowing that they are important members of our families and communities. We want all of our children to have the chance to grow up free from violence and abuse, in healthy communities where the future holds more than alcohol and drug abuse and the possibility that they, or one of their friends will commit suicide.

In the context of finding solutions to family violence, I would like to speak for a few moments about shelters. Shelters provide a safe place for women and children who are fleeing violence and have nowhere else to go. Shelters are thus a response to violence, not a solution. They are often used as a last resort, the place where women go when they can no longer live with violence or the level of violence becomes life-threatening. If women were not being beaten and abused, there would be no need for shelters.

The Inuktitut word for shelter, *Qimaavik* means a place to run away or escape to. In my travels, I have heard Inuit say that shelters encourage family break-ups. I believe that it is violence, not shelters, which breaks up families. Perhaps we need a better word, not *Qimaavik*, but something describing a shelter as a place of safety. And we need to look towards the future, to a time when no one needs to leave their home or their community to feel safe.


I wish there was not a need for shelters in the North, but at this point in time, there is. Many Inuit women are being beaten by husbands and boyfriends in their own homes. One alternative might be to set up centres where men who batter and abuse must go for help. This would allow women to stay at home while their husbands receive the counselling and treatment they need to change their violent behaviour. It certainly makes more sense to remove the person causing the problem than to force the victims to leave home. The man would be allowed to return only when his wife and the counsellors at the centre all believe he will not be violent again. This is an approach I would prefer, but until we are able to establish treatment centres for batterers, women need to have access to a safe place.

We sometimes hear complaints that the solutions we advocate are too southern, too *Qallunaat* [non-Inuit]-oriented, or that they undermine Inuit culture. Culturally-based solutions are important and the facilities and services we need to address the problems facing Inuit communities must be rooted in our culture and traditions. Equally important is the need to develop solutions which

work. When we support day care, we are not just advocating the creation of southern-type child care facilities, we are talking about the creation of a northern child care system. The world is changing, and our culture and lifestyles have changed in order to meet the challenges the world presents us with. More and more Inuit mothers are working outside the home so there is a real need for safe, reliable, affordable child care. We have examples of daycare centres in the North which reflect the best of Inuit and southern life, which operate in both Inuktitut and English, and provide children with the care they need while their parents are at work.

---

*To those men who believe that Pauktuutit is trying to take their rights away, I would say that equality never diminishes anyone. We do not seek power over men, but rather, equality with men.*



We often use the word culture to describe our history, yet culture is a living, changing entity. Contemporary Inuit culture reflects our deeply rooted traditions, beliefs, and practices as well as our contact with *Qallunaat*. We cannot blindly cling to the past. The problems we face today are so different from what our ancestors experienced that we need to search for new solutions, new methods. In many ways we are lucky, for we can choose from the best of our own traditions and those of the southern society.

Without question, we live in two worlds: we still hunt for our food but when we get home, we can cook it in a microwave oven and eat in front of the television. On our stereos, we can listen to rock and roll music or throat singing depending on our mood or our preference. Even rap music is not entirely new to our culture; we had our own kind of rapping in drum dancing songs. Each generation has its own stories to tell and they tell them in their own way. We must be willing to learn from our Elders and our young people for they both have something to teach us about life. Our Elders remind us of our rich culture, traditions, and history while our youth can teach us what it is like to live in the modern world.

Finally, I would like to speak about leadership. Two years ago, in Kuujjuak, delegates to Pauktuutit's 1992 annual meeting passed a resolution directing us to develop a "code of conduct" for Inuit leaders. Following the annual general meeting, we sent the resolution to all Inuit organizations asking for information and input into the development of this code. A code of conduct for Inuit leaders, once passed by an organization, sets the standards of leadership that members of the organization wish to uphold. It sends a clear message regarding the expectations placed on Inuit leaders. In effect, a code of conduct describes our collective vision of what a leader should be. It also sets limits by describing conduct we wish our leaders to avoid.

The following code of conduct is presented for discussion. Delegates are asked to consider whether it reflects their expectations of Inuit leaders and to add to it or suggest changes over the course of the annual general meeting. The Resolutions Committee will meet to prepare a revised code of conduct based on the discussions which take place, and a resolution will be presented for a vote on the final day. Once passed, it will be distributed to Inuit organizations and to hamlet and community councils throughout the North as a clearly articulated statement of what Inuit women expect of their leaders.

#### Code of Conduct for Inuit Leaders

Inuit traditions and values include a respect for individuals and a concern for the collectivity, including the family, extended family, community, and Inuit society. Inuit leaders must work on behalf of their people in a way which reflects this tradition of respect and concern. This means putting the good of the people before personal gain, listening to and acting upon the will of the people, and respecting democratic practices by including as many people as possible in decision-making. In giving our leaders the right to speak on our behalf, we urge them not to abuse the trust we place in them.

Inuit society includes women and men of all ages, yet women, youth, and Elders are under-represented in leadership and decision-making roles. Inuit organizations should take positive steps to encourage the participation of women, youth, and Elders and to address issues of particular concern to women, youth, and Elders. Inuit leaders should be responsible for ensuring that women, youth and Elders are adequately represented in their organizations.

Women, in particular, are confronted with barriers which inhibit their participation in leadership positions. These may include sexual harassment at meetings or on the job, being subjected to negative comments when they raise sensitive issues such as family violence, or not being invited to participate in meetings and organizations dealing with particular issues (for example, economic development, or lands and resources). Inuit leaders must make a commitment to actively represent all of their people—women as well as men—by working to remove the barriers to women's participation in all areas of public life.

Leadership is an honour and a responsibility. There are qualities and skills that a leader must develop in order to fulfill the responsibility and be worthy of the honour. These include commitment, sensitivity, kindness, a sense of fairness, honesty, integrity, accountability, the willingness to listen, the courage to stand up for what is right, and an understanding of Inuit culture, values, traditions, and history.

Inuit leaders have additional responsibilities as public figures and role models. These include not engaging in conduct which hurts other people, breaks laws, or is harmful to Inuit society. Alcohol and drug abuse is a serious and ongoing social problem and consequently,

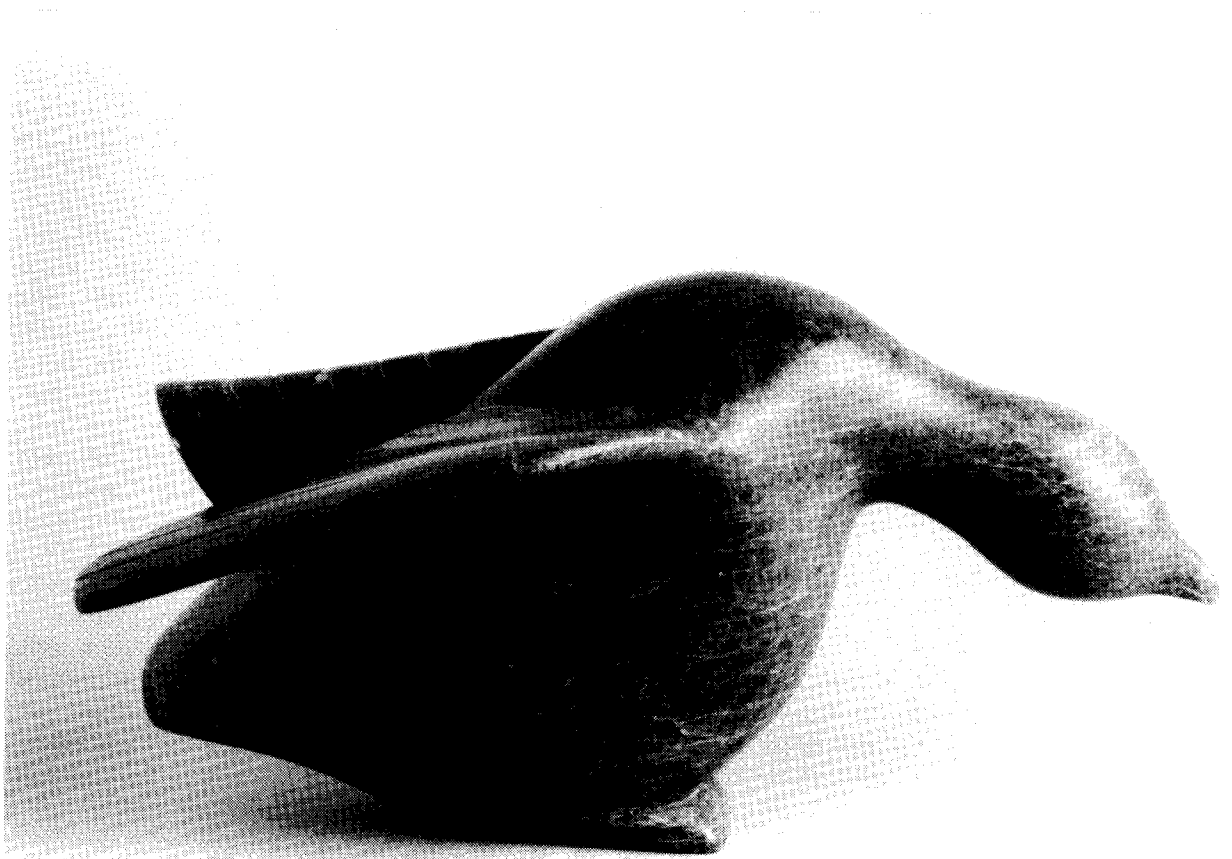
Inuit leaders should not abuse these substances. Acts of violence against women and children, including sexual assault, child abuse, child sexual abuse, and wife battering are absolutely unacceptable, and any leader who engages in such conduct should immediately step aside.

Pauktuutit encourages all organizations and bodies with elected leaders to adopt this code of conduct or to develop their own code. Elected leaders, including members of Boards of Directors, and municipal, provincial, and federal politicians should agree, in writing, to abide by an ethical code by signing a copy of the code of conduct. In addition, the code of conduct should be posted in the offices of Inuit organizations, as well as in municipal offices and other public areas.

I would like to thank all of the people in Iqaluit who worked so hard to help us organize this annual meeting. I am also grateful that there has been so much interest among women in the communities, and I sincerely wish we had the funds to bring more women to our annual meetings.

*This presentation was made in Inuktitut. Simultaneous translation into English was available at the meeting.*

*Martha Flaherty has been the President of Pauktuutit, the Inuit Women's Association of Canada, since March 1991. She has also been an active member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. Ms. Flaherty was born in Inukjuaq, Quebec (formerly Port Harrison) and was relocated with her family to Grise Ford, Northwest Territories at the age of five. She was at the forefront in seeking compensation and an official apology from the government of Canada for this forced relocation. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has recently confirmed that the government's primary motivation was to assert Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, and that Inuit are entitled compensation and an official apology. Ms. Flaherty is a popular speaker, who is frequently asked to address family violence, health and social issues. As a result of her tireless work on behalf of Inuit women, she has become one of the most well-respected Inuit leaders in Canada.*



*Ovilu Tunnillie, Soapstone Carving, Courtesy Ward Collection*

*Photo: Yukon Government*