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Thank you very much for bringing me here to your event. First, I'd like to acknowledge that I am on traditional lands, in the territory of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee peoples. And thank you, Moderator; and also to Dr. Glynis Williams of International Ministries and the Cutting Edge of Mission committee who have brought me here to present me with this remarkable award, an acknowledgement of my life's work. So thank you for having me here.

Indeed, I started my life very humbly in that little community which at the time was called Fort Chimo. It was an old Hudson's Bay company post where I travelled only by dog team the first ten years of my life. I didn't start to learn any English at all until the age of six. These are my humble beginnings, raised by my grandmother and my mother. In those days the white fathers didn't stay. And so here I am in the world trying to make a difference from the very foundation that I was given and feeling very blessed by the meaningful work that has found its way to me.

Today is a remarkable day. Yes, I understand that I have been decorated for this work and I'm very humbled by it. But I never see it so much as being about me - the personality receiving all of these accolades - but more about people hearing the message and resonating with the work that I have been doing for a long time. You know, very few people know about the Arctic and its people. In fact, more people know about the wildlife of the Arctic than its people.

The work that I have been doing for the last 15 to 20 years has been to put a human face to the issue. And now, more importantly with climate change, to humanize the issue of climate change when most people tend to understand this issue as a political issue, as an economic issue, a scientific issue, an academic issue. But in reality for us, of course, it is a human issue. When I started this work back when I was elected to the Inuit Council, the same was true for the issues of toxins in our food chain. The nursing milk of our mothers has higher levels than anywhere else in the world as a result of toxins making their way into our bodies. The daunting task for me was to try to get all of these countries at the UN level to address this not just as a chemical story but as one of human health for the Inuit of the Arctic.

And so the women, the mothers of the world, were carrying the brunt of the way in which we do business in this world. It should not be the mothers of the world, the Inuit being the net recipients of these toxins as a result of mothers in Africa, for example, who were trying to spare the death of their babies from malaria by using DDT. And so I kept saying, and we always said in our negotiations: what a world we have created when mothers of the world have to carry the burden of all these things that are happening to the health of people. Climate change is huge. It's big, more challenging in fact, and daunting. But because of the experience that I had in

helping negotiate the UN treaty that became the Stockholm Convention, I became convinced that the world can do the right thing.

And so we moved ahead and started to work very diligently on the issues of climate change - really humanizing it, not just in terms of giving it a human face but making it a human rights issue. One has to remember that as Inuit we are reliant upon the ice, the snow and the cold for our way of life. For us, the ice and the snow are our transportation and our mobility. And as soon as that starts to go, it becomes an issue of safety and security right away. Over the past ten decades in particular, we are losing more and more of our hunters through the thinning ice in the Arctic as a result of the warming that's happening to our planet. So we have to understand that the Arctic is a very key place in this world and that what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic.

In fact the Arctic is a cooling system. It is the air conditioner for the planet and it is breaking down. As a result of that, it's impacting the ocean currents. Oceans are the drivers of climate change and this impacts everything. So whatever is happening in the world today is triggered by the melting of the Arctic Sea ice, in particular with the Greenland ice sheet that is on land. It is creating a sea level rise in many other parts of the world. You can't get clearer than that in understanding just how connected and interconnected our world is.

But one must also understand that the Inuit culture is an important culture to maintain. It isn't just about the harvesting of animals, although that's a very big part of who we are because that's our organic farm out there. Our supermarket is the environment where we go to get our wonderful nutritious food. It gives us not only nutritious food, but it also gives us the connection to source on so many levels.

But it's not just about the nutritional value of the food, but about what living in the cold gives us spiritually, emotionally, culturally, all of those things. As you're out there hunting, of course, the technical aspect of it is really important for our younger generation to learn and what they gain from that - the technical aspect of becoming a natural conservationist and a proficient provider for their families. And that's really important, those technical aspects to become that great harvester, to bring home this wonderful food to your family every day. But it's also the character and life-building skills that are required for you to not only survive but to be able to thrive as an individual. And what I mean by that is that when you're out there waiting for that snow to fall and the ice to form and the winds to die and the animals to surface, you are learning patience. You are learning about yourself. And so you learn to become courageous at the right time. You take the right survival-based risks to be able to become confident as a provider for your family. You learn how to deal with stressful situations, to be bold under pressure, how not to be impulsive. And one of the things that we're learning - because we are dealing with the highest suicide rates in North America - is that impulsivity is a major problem when it comes to suicides. Nature is a natural teacher, and if you've learned on the land how not to be impulsive and that by being impulsive, you are putting yourself and others around you at risk - if you've had that integrated from the natural way of teaching - you are more apt to be

able to deal with the modern stressors that come your way.

Those connections are really important. The courageous way, developing your confidence and self-worth are so important in light of our historical traumas and colonial histories. We have to have that kind of strength back in our lives. Our land and what we have, we may lose. We may lose that sound judgment and wisdom. So it's not just the ice that we're losing with changes in our climate. It is the wisdom that we lose with it. And these are the pieces that we need to understand better in a world that is changing very rapidly. As I said earlier, imagine going from dog team at my age in one lifetime to what we are living with today, where most societies have taken perhaps 350 years to adjust and to adapt to a modern setting that we're living in today.

The speed in which change has happened has certainly contributed to the problems that we are facing at the social and health levels in our communities. But certainly it's about all that is happening now as well. As we try to prepare our children for the opportunities and challenges of life we are dealing with all of those changes, the historical traumas. And now as we reach out we realize that the answer lies within us, it lies within our culture. It lies within the incredible ingenuity of a culture that has built a *qayaq* (kayak), which is the boat that is replicated worldwide. And we are not just victims to globalization, but we are a people who have contributed. We are people who can build a home of snow warm enough for our babies to lie in and our mothers to birth in. This is ingenuity at its best. Our culture has much to offer.

As we come to the realization that Inuit culture is a remarkable culture to be protected, we realize that the next wave of tumultuous change is upon us. And so the very thing that we're turning to is starting to become precarious and adding more stress to an already very vulnerable situation. I'm not here to just paint a dark and gloomy picture because there are some remarkable things starting to happen in our world. I want to give you the indication that we as all Canadians and all common humanity have a sense of responsibility about what's happening to the Arctic's ice. We want to move in a direction that better understands one another and not 'other' one another. And to really just get those voices out there about how important it is to understand that what is happening in the Arctic is a reflection of what's happening in the southern parts of the world.

Now, what I consider south is anything beyond a few hundred miles south of us - Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and so on. We need to address these issues in a way that does not just politicize the issue because I think the movement is not necessarily going to be in politics. Politics has its own culture. It has its own way and it is very slow to take action because of the nature of politics and the elections. Oftentimes the leaders have really good intentions and promise to make real change in our communities. However, when push comes to shove, there is an awful lot of compromising that has to be done. So when I give talks across this country, I always speak to everybody as though we were all in it together.

It's not just for the politicians to lead but for all of us to lead on these issues that bind us together - the common humanity that we are. It has been a daunting task to try to get that on the map. As I said, the world knows the Arctic wildlife better than the people who live there.

And there seems to be this disconnect that often happens about the inhospitable Arctic that's always so cold and dark. How can you possibly live up there without really fully knowing the warmth and the hospitality that exists in our communities and the remarkable culture that lives there? We are trying our best to make it for our children and our grandchildren. There is a historical context to the social and health challenges that we face.

In the book I wrote, I really wanted the younger generation to better understand this context. It has been very difficult for our younger generation to take on the unresolved historical traumas of the colonial past of our country. And I wanted the younger generation to understand these pieces better so that the load they carry can perhaps be lessened a little - that burden that they carry with what's happened - with the violence and the abuses and the addictions that exist in our aboriginal communities of this country. And also to try to educate the world on what has been happening through that process. So I wrote the book on several levels - as a memoir on the life that I have led and the feelings that I have had in terms of how to overcome some obstacles in my life.

That is through the spiritual journey I have been on since I was in my mid thirties. It has been the most helpful thing for me to realize that we are not just form; that we are spirit in action as we move forward in the mission that we are here for. And so it's been quite the journey. In writing the book, I borrow the line from Maya Angelou that most people have come to know my glory because of the recognition that I've received around the world, which I'm very honoured by. They have come to know my glory but not my story. And it was important for me to share it in a way that would connect us all no matter who you are, because we're all in it together.

We've all had challenges in life, we've all had struggles. There are always going to be obstacles, but there are ways in which we can overcome them. And so the connections that are made are really important. Just three days ago I was in Paris, France, doing a book launch as part of a large music festival that was happening there. My book has now been translated into French and I'm from Quebec. So I was proud to say, yes, that's great that it's now in French. And then I was invited for this huge book launch at a music festival in Paris. It was a very nice setting in a tent outside where people would come and go, and sit down and listen.

They had already been forewarned by their newspaper, *Le Monde*, that I was coming. This is something that I can pretty much handle. The introduction mentioned that I'm an introvert doing extrovert work. It takes a lot for me to get up in crowds and speak, but I can do it. In her book called *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain says that you can do anything when you have a personal mission or project in life. So here I was and this was the kind of crowd that I was able to speak to in my own zen mode.

But then somebody came up to me and said, 'This is a huge music festival. There are a lot of young people and we're asking speakers if they would come to the opening of some of the concerts where there will be huge crowds of young people. It will be a techno concert. Would you be willing to do a three minute call to action on climate change just before this big

concert?' 'Okay.' So I thought, 'Okay, well, for me it's about connecting,' and off I went and I was escorted off to the beginning of this concert and up the steps of this platform that leads up to the stage.

And I'm thinking, 'Okay, here we go.' And you know, I didn't realize until I got out there that there were literally thousands of young people that were very psyched up and geared to listen to their techno concert. And I thought, 'How is this energy going to match and how is it going to connect?' And so it just became a moment. I seized the moment. I went out there, I was introduced, I seized the moment with the microphone. And it just became one of those powerful moments that I had not anticipated or expected because it was about the openheartedness of the connection that was happening there in that very moment. And I thought, are they going to even understand me because I'm speaking English and they're French? But yes, they understood!

They got the message, they cheered it, they embraced it. And in three minutes we were in this exhilarated place that I had not anticipated. You can never assume that you're in the wrong audience or that you're in a different way of seeing things in life. The bottom line is that we are all connected spiritually. We need to keep addressing these issues from that human perspective, from the spiritual perspective; what is really needed in this world to address these monumental issues is a change in our attitudes towards each other. A change in the attitudes towards 'othering' one another, and to embrace and understand that the indigenous peoples of the world, including the Inuit of the Arctic, have had one heck of a history. And that is why we struggle the way that we do.

It's not because we're weak and it's not because we don't have the ability to adapt to a modern setting, which many people tend to think is the case. This couldn't be farther from the truth. We are an extremely adaptable people, which is why we have survived a millennia in the harshest environments in the world. We must bring back the human aspect to these issues, which are often so politicized and fought over. It is about the connection that we have lost to one another, it is about the connection we have lost to our food source, it is about the connection we have lost to our environment that we are even debating this issue of climate change in the first place. So for me to be here in this quiet audience, very different from last Sunday's event, yet so similar in terms of the connections we make and the connections that I made with the Cutting Edge of Mission committee even before coming here, it is an honour to be with all of you today and to be receiving this award. *Nakurmiik*. Thank you.