

**"Your views on future implementing measures for  
the basic regulation on trade in seal products"**

**Response from the Inuit Circumpolar Council (Greenland)**

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak on this very important matter.

Inuit in Greenland Canada Alaska and Chukotka have since time immemorial been living from the living resources in our vast regions. This economy and is still today the backbone of our culture and so it will be in the future. Our culture and our economy are closely linked. Today Inuit of the world are counting 160.000 souls. We, the Inuit, has always strived for a sustainable use of the resources which surrounds us. It is our deep understanding that everything is interconnected. This understanding is reflected in our story about the woman of the sea bed, Sassuma Arnaa. She is, according to our legends, the one who is keeping an eye on how we use the living resources around us, and if we are using them in an acceptable and – thus – sustainable manner. Today we use the words "sustainable use of the living resources". These words are no different in what Sassuma Arnaa was aiming to teach us. She was able to punish the Inuit if they misused the resources. We were told that she would keep the living resources with her and not allow the Inuit to take any from her. That is, unless they had been guided by the Shaman of how to use it in a sustainable manner.

The EU ban on seal products, even with an so-called "Inuit exemption" has already resulted in a collapse of the market. Greenland and Canada has sold zero (0) products in 2008. Many of the erroneous beliefs found among well-meaning (and less well-meaning) environmental or animal rights organizations that gave rise to this illogical ban in the first place, fostered a down-turn in the market even before the ban. Our hunters do not understand what they have done wrong. They continue to practise sustainable hunting, as guided by Sassuma Arnaa.

Just as our culture and our economy is closely linked, so is our eco-system. Even Europeans are starting to understand what our grandparents have understood for thousands of years, and your scientists now promote what they call an eco-system approach to managing the environment. Our hunters, in fact, work with scientists in developing various large marine ecosystem-base management approaches. And they work. That is, until one species is treated differently. That is what we fear is happening in the seal product ban.

We are still unclear, after this initial consultation, how the ban and the exemption will move forward. We believe the European Commission is equally unclear. We have some questions. And we have some starting suggestions.

How is EU planning to full-fil its commitment in regards to the exemption? Maybe we could offer some starting points for discussion as you head down the path of trying to implement this exemption.

- Seen from our point of view, we believe a campaign to illuminate the EU citizens and the Inuit communities are needed.
- A program for the education of the hunters, whose income is mainly from the products in question are needed. If they cannot sell their surplus, what will they do? We need a socio-economic study on this.
- A program for compensating their loss must be started immediately, since they are already suffering from the regulation, even if it has not been started yet.

The European Union knows full well that the effects of climate change have had devastating effects on our hunters, although the media here in Europe tend to focus on the effects that climate change is

having on our animals. We do not see a difference because, as mentioned earlier, Inuit believe life is interconnected. We are part of the environment. Because of climate change, we need to adapt. Added to the effects of climate change, we now have to fight the European Union on this illogical ban, rather than work with them on climate change. Because of the EU seal ban, we need to adapt.

We are in the midst of change for many reasons. We call upon Europeans to take some responsibility towards our communities as we adapt our ways of life.

You know that the large-scale animal rights organizations, who in our opinion do not accurately reflect the truth, have large resources. We hope that the European Commission will work with us to help tell a balanced story into the future. Thank-you.