

# Nunavut: Towards 1999!

By Natalie Novik

After 20 years of negotiations, Nunavut, the Inuit territory in Canada, is about to become a reality: on Nov. 3, 4 and 5, 68% of the Inuit in the Northwest Territories (NWT) voted yes in a referendum to ratify the Nunavut Land Claim. Nunavut will split from the Northwest Territories to become a separate region by the end of this century. "The next step is now to enter political negotiations with the government to create a Nunavut territory and government," says Titus Alloo, Chairman of the Nunavut Caucus.

The seeds of Nunavut started 1973, when the organization Inuit Tapirisat (Inuit Brotherhood) started negotiating with the government over Inuit land claims and hunting rights. The idea to split the NWT between Nunavut ("our land" in Inuit) and Denendeh ("Land of the Dene Indians") was formulated to differentiate between the needs of those two Native groups. Several drafts were proposed, but got nowhere because of conflicting interests between Western oil-rich regions along the MacKenzie Delta and the more traditional Eastern Inuit in the NWT. In 1982, the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), an organization representing the interests of the Eastern Inuit, took over the negotiations with the Federal Government, which led to the signature of an Agreement in Principle in 1990.

The Agreement in Principle was the first hurdle to overcome, but three more remained in the negotiators path: First, the Inuit had to agree on the boundaries. Secondly, the voters had to agree on the surrender of the land claims,

and finally, an agreement had to be negotiated with the government regarding the creation of a separate government for Nunavut. The territory boundaries were confirmed in a May 4 boundary plebiscite by a majority of Inuit in the Northwest Territories, but opposed by the Dene who fear that the boundaries will overlap their own territory. The largest obstacle though in obtaining a consensus among the Inuit about Nunavut was the inclusion in the final agreement of a clause under which the Inuit will "Surrender" their title to the land to the Canadian government, given the history of Native claims on the American continent, one understands easily the reticence displayed by some.

One should remember this surrender, in the eyes of the TFN negotiators, is done in exchange for something very precious: a clear definition between the Inuit themselves and the government of Inuit rights and benefits with regard to the lands, waters and other resources. It is not the case at the present time in the NWT: Inuit rights are not defined, there is no clear understanding about subsistence non-renewable resources, or sovereignty. The Charlottetown Accord, which represented an effort on the part of the Federal Government to define Native rights and self-government in the Canadian Constitution, while approved in last Oct.'s national referendum by 76% of voters in the Canadian Arctic, was defeated by a majority of Southern Canadians. Without an amendment to the Constitution, the Inuit had no choice but to ratify Nunavut if they wanted their rights defined and self-government. The posi-

tive vote in the Nov. showed a majority of Inuit agreed to the surrender clause, provided they gained something in return.

On the part of the Canadian government, negotiations were undertaken as a result of a perception by the Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs the old treaty-making policy was no longer meeting contemporary needs. In a brochure entitled "Comprehensive Land Claims Policy", the department states there is a need for "new approaches to the cession and surrender of title, self-government, wildlife and environmental management, the inclusion of offshore areas in negotiations and resource revenue-sharing.

A gigantic effort was made by TFN to inform the public about the referendums they had to cope with this year, and mounds of literature were available in English, Inuktitut and Dene. Vigorous debates took place along the campaign trail followed by TFN and the Nunavut Commission. But in the end, a majority of Inuit felt their rights and their sovereignty deserved to make some concessions to the Canadian government.

The final agreement, when passed into law by the Canadian Parliament, will include the payment over 14 years of \$580 million (or \$1.4 billion at the end of the 14 years) to the Inuit beneficiaries, who will keep fee simple title to 18% of the land in Nunavut, or 137,000 square miles. The rest of their land claim will be administered by Ottawa, under the surrendering clause of the agreement. But the Inuit will have a voice on the exploitation of the land through a number of boards in charge of land management, resource man-

agement, wildlife, and subsistence. It also foresees the creation of a government center (other than Yellowknife), the cost of which will be supported by the government. The agreement also provides for a Nunavut Social Development Council, in charge of supporting the traditional subsistence lifestyle, and an Inuit Heritage Trust created to protect culture and language.

The Inuits and the government representatives signed in Iqaluit Nov. 20 what is called the Nunavut Accord, which foresees the following:

- the powers of the Nunavut government will be the same as those of the GNWT,
- a Nunavut Implementation Commission is created to work on the location of the capital, the government structures, and planning for the first Nunavut legislative assembly election,
- Ottawa will pay the extra cost of creating and running Nunavut.

A priority will be given to train Nunavut residents within seven years from now, they are able to take the reins of the new government. However, Nunavut will not be an Inuit-only structure. One of the chief negotiators, John Amagoalik, points to the fact that the Inuit do not wish to have a race-based government, and that positions will be opened to all.

What will happen to the rest of the NWT in 1999? The proposal today is the NWT Government will be replaced by a Western Territories government, encompassing the Inuvialuit Region, the only Inuit region not incorporated in Nunavut, as well as the territories of the Dene and Metis

people. There will be two territorial governments, one in East Nunavut, for which the location of the capital still has to be decided, and one in the West with the capital in Yellowknife. Stephen Kakfwi, Intergovernmental Affairs Minister in the NWT government, says "it should be the Dene, Metis and Inuvialuit who take the next step."

One wonders what the future holds for other Inuits in Northern Quebec and Labrador. As far as Quebec is concerned, it is possible that a harder position on the part of the French separatists, who contributed mightily to the defeat of the Charlottetown Accord, will lead the Quebec Inuit to look towards Nunavut. The French Canadians are already forcing on them bilingual and bicultural policies which disregard their traditional culture to impose the French one, and this is deeply resented by the Inuit. In several decades, it would be conceivable that the Quebec Inuit and perhaps also the Labrador Inuit will join Nunavut. The only Inuit left out of Nunavut would then be the Inuvialuit, in the Western Arctic, but for the time being, they have negotiated a strong and satisfying settlement with Canada and do not seem eager to jeopardize their gains.

So for the Inuit in the Eastern Arctic, the challenge is now to build their own government, perhaps along the lines of the present NWT government, but also probably as a decentralized administrative body which will be there to serve the traditional and contemporary needs of the Inuit. Hopefully, Nunavut will represent seven years from now a model for Native rights.