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*Inuit Circumpolar Conference*

Well, the Inuit here in the Arctic have always been connected to the land. We live off the land in terms of hunting, fishing, gathering. We have done so for millennia and the connection is still very powerful even today.

In the mid-80s when the science started to come in about how the chemicals were starting to come up into the Arctic sink and the high levels that were being found in our bodies, in the nursing milk of our mothers, it was an extremely alarming time for us. We were quite outraged by what was happening and we realized that toxins from as far away as Central America and China and Russia were coming and poisoning us. And so the food that has nourished us spiritually, emotionally and physically was now poisoning us and it was not of our doing.

So these issues are monumental challenges because we are only 155,000 Inuit in the entire world and we're up against millions and billions of people who would rather keep status quo and not do too much about what's happening to our planet. And certainly here in the Arctic we have become the early warning system. Because we are a people that live on the ice and snow, we witness the most minute of changes to the environment. We are the canary in the mine, so to speak. And it's very important, I think, that the world pay heed to this.

We are the land and the land is us. There is a balance that has to be met because, heaven forbid, if we stop hunting and stop eating our country food, then we are no longer the Inuit that we have been for a millennia.

Seal hunting is absolutely important in order to nourish us and to give us the food that we require. But the process of the hunt is very powerful and that is something that most people have not come to understand. The hunt itself and the process of it teaches us such wisdom to-- be able to go out there and build character for our children, meaning the holistic approach of teaching and learning is absolutely important for anybody to survive. And the teaching is about making sound judgment, about being patient, being bold under pressure, being able to combat stress, all of those things that young people need to survive the changes from such a very traditional way of life. So it is to our land and to our culture that we reach now for the answers for the social upheaval that has happened in the fabric of our society. It's absolutely important that we not only remain on the land to gain the wisdom that we require to survive, but to be able to transfer that wisdom to this modern way that we are now facing.

This is a rich and vibrant, resilient culture that we come from and we want to hold on to it. We don't want to lose our country food to toxins and nor do we want to lose our environment and our ice and snow to global warming. Global warming is something that is happening to us. There seems to be a real disproportionate negative impact happening to us Inuit in the Arctic in terms of the contaminants and in terms of climate change.

Climate change is not a theory. It's a reality here in the Arctic. We are getting ice forming much later in the year and breaking up much earlier in the year. We are getting insects that have never been up here in the Arctic before. We're getting species of birds and fish that have not been up here before. Our whole world is being altered up here in the Arctic and I think the world has to pay heed to that.