



Minister's Statement

No. _____

Date _____

The Honourable Eva Ariak
Premier

Arctic Stewardship

Mr. Speaker, members will remember from the November Leadership Forum that I view Arctic Sovereignty as one of three serious challenges we will be engaged in over the next decade. At that time, I committed to leading Nunavut and asserting the role of Inuit as guardians of the Arctic.

Our focus is on the people who live here in the North and our communities.

The visit of United States President Obama to Canada last month was an important signal that his administration recognizes that Canada is a close friend and ally for the United States. For Nunavut and for Canada, I believe that it also put a spotlight on the Arctic and the issue of the Northwest Passage.

Nunavummiut support Canada's position on the status of the Passage as a key component of our exercise of Canadian sovereignty and security in the Arctic.

Inuit use and occupancy of the waters, ice and shoreline of that Passage over centuries continues to provide a basis for Canada's historic title over these waters.

More than about sovereignty, the issue with the United States and other nations is whether the waters of the Northwest Passage constitute an international strait or internal Canadian waters.

Nunavut is concerned that there is a real liability for us – for our internal waters, the ice over it and the seabed below it, and our shorelines-- to have the Northwest Passage as an international transit with an unregulated right of passage through Canada's internal waters. Those waters are significant areas where Inuit have traditionally travelled and harvested- and Nunavummiut continue to do so today, and for the marine mammals that are so important to our culture.

In our relations with the United States as an Arctic neighbour, I believe that Americans and Canadians share a common interest in acting as stewards of the Arctic waters that are adjacent to the Canada and U.S. borders. And frankly, I think Americans and Canadians share a common interest in not having uncontrolled, international maritime access to and through the Northwest Passage.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage Canada to collaborate with the United States and other members of the Arctic Council on environmental stewardship and governance in the Arctic region. I welcome federal Foreign Affairs Minister Cannon's address last week on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy, and his diplomatic efforts next month in Washington and at the Arctic Council meeting in Tromsø, Norway.