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**The Human Rights Council of Greenland**  
**and**

**Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland**

**Contribution to EMRIPs Study on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the**

**UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

**February 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

We are happy to provide the following information as our preliminary contribution to EMRIP’s study on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under UNDRIP by HRCG and ICC. We look forward to review of the study as it develops and future opportunities to offer additional information about conditions for children and youth throughout Inuit Nunaat, especially offering additional materials from each of ICC’s four offices in Nuuk, Greenland; Ottawa, Canada; Anchorage, Alaska; and Anadyr, Chukotka, Russia.

Presently, the Human Rights Council of Greenland and the Inuit Circumpolar Council refers to EMRIP’s Call for Contributions to the Study on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and specifically to look into the following practices and issues.

The stated practices and listed issues raised in this document based on the work of the Human Rights Council of Greenland, MIO - Greenland’s National Child Rights Institution and Tilioq – Greenland’s National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities, pertain to the peoples of Greenland, where the majority of the population is Inuit.

Though much of the present issues raised in this document are informed by work primarily done by Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland, much of the same elements pertain to children throughout Inuit Nunaat, our homelands, which includes the Arctic regions of Chukotka, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.

Given the universal nature of human rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CROC] applies to all Indigenous children. All Indigenous persons with disabilities enjoy the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] and all Indigenous women have the right to be protected from discrimination and violence under Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW], and so forth. An integration of the rights enshrined in other human rights instruments and those affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] is necessary, and further work must be done to make sure both the UN Agencies and UN member states recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples and particularly, the interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible nature of our individual and collective human rights.

To the Study on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under UNDRIP, the Human Rights Council of Greenland and Inuit Circumpolar Council refers to the issues and practices regarding children’s rights raised in the status reports as well as parallel reports for examinations in the UN, written by the Human Rights Council of Greenland together with the Danish Institute of Human Rights. The reports contain what the Human Rights Council of Greenland presented on the EMRIP seminar on Indigenous Children’s Rights in November 2020.

The HRCG and ICC presents best practices of MIO – Greenland’s National Child Rights’ Institution’s work. The practices were presented by the National Children Rights advocate on the EMRIP seminar on Indigenous Children’s Rights in November 2020.

Moreover, the HRCG and ICC refer to ICC’s Inuit Education Committee, which was established to ensure the Inuit child’s right to its Indigenous language and culture in all of Inuit Nunaat. The councils also refer to project CREATeS that ICC developed together with the Arctic Council Sustainable Development Working Group [SDWG] co-leads, as an example of the work done in the prevention of suicide among youth in the Arctic.

**ISSUES – poverty, suicide, violence, and abuse**

**The status report on children and youth[[1]](#footnote-1)** in Greenland, 2019, provides a brief description of developments in children’s rights and describes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Greenlandic legislation with significance for the Convention. The following three selected topics are addressed with recommendations on how human rights can be strengthened in Greenland:

* Neglect, violence, and abuse
* Children and young people in care
* Children and young people on the edge of the law

The relevance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for children and young people in Greenland are also described in the report.

It is estimated that over 11 percent of all children in Greenland lived in relative poverty in 2010. A 2015 survey showed that 12 percent of the children surveyed in 2014 always or often went hungry to bed or to school. Greenland has about 40 suicides a year. The suicide rate is about 80 per 100,000 inhabitants and thus far higher than in the rest of the Nordic countries. Formerly, while it has been young Greenlanders in the age group 20-24 years who have chosen to take their lives, the number of young people who commit suicide before the age of 20 has increased in recent years.1

Domestic violence against children and sexual abuse in childhood is a substantial problem. According to reports, 28 percent of young children in Greenland have been exposed to domestic violence. 24 percent of 15‐29-year-olds have experienced ‘forced or attempted forced sexual activity before they turned 18. Among children exposed to sexual violence and abuse, we see an over representation of girls. A survey shows that among youth under the age of 15, 22 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys did not themselves decide their first sexual experience.   
One in three girls and one in ten boys in Greenland have experienced sexual abuse.1

It is clear that we are facing serious violations of rights of the Indigenous child in Greenland.

**BEST PRACTICES – listen to the children.**

The HRCG and ICC present to the EMRIP study the work and working method of MIO as best practices. We also note that MIO has sent their own submission to the EMRIP study.

**MIO - Greenland’s National Child Rights Institution[[2]](#footnote-2)**, has developed an approach based on talking and listening to children and their families, into a systematic working method, that is highly recommended for other Indigenous societies. The children and the families often come up with the best solution. Through dialogues, surveys, interaction, and participant observation with children, community members, professionals from health, school and social sectors, MIO’s method has shown the underlying adult taboo behavior and other social structures that influence children’s and families’ lives in Greenland. Since 2015, MIO has visited and talked to children and community members in 40 cities and settlements in Greenland. The result is a series of travel reports with a collection of statements and recommendations from the rights holders themselves. Through these visits MIO estimates that Greenland does not comply with up to 20 articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Some of MIO’s findings in Greenland are:

* Sexual assaults are taking place in all social groups, not only in families with severe social problems. In some places the abuse has been going on for generations without anyone acting on it.
* Underreporting of sexual assaults to the authorities is widespread. Due to, among other reasons, fear from exclusion from the community, secrecy due to guilt and shame dynamics and fear of stigma.
* There is a clash between individualism and collectivism. Families have to adapt to a system that does not take into account how indigenous family culture is constructed.
* Young survivors and young people with traumas do not get the required psychological help. Studies indicate that children who are victims of neglect often have learning difficulties. So, despite a modern Greenlandic law on primary and lower-secondary education, which is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is nevertheless an excessively large group of young people who get no education: About half of the population of all 25-64 year old persons have no education above the lower-secondary level.
* Equal access to healthcare services is incredibly challenging in Greenland partly because of the geography and infrastructure. As a grave example of the implications for children, MIO has spoken to health professionals in smaller settlements without a doctor, who have encountered children with symptoms of sexual abuse. Due to the geographical distance and the travel time to get the child to a doctor, physical evidence of abuse is diminished or lost and the further process stalls, leaving the child with no restoration or psychological recovery.
* When issues of sexual assault, bias, and abuse is being highlighted and brought into light it is not uncommon that adult people react with disbelief and denial. Some professionals and authorities shelve cases of abuse in order to protect other adults.

Each town and settlement have its own collective cultural codes, values, and norms. MIO adapts their methods to each location, to meet the people in an equal and respectful way, without getting into their various degrees and types of taboo.

It is a method that has proven to be able to create a marked and necessary awareness of the conditions of children and young people in Greenland. Serious taboos about the conditions of children, young people and families have come to light and are brought up and articulated in a way that creates action in both the population and by politicians.

**ISSUES – conditions of children with disabilities**

**The status report about disability[[3]](#footnote-3)**in Greenland, 2019, focuses on how the authorities in Greenland implement and comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention requires Greenland to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as others, for example in relation to education, housing, and employment.

As stated in the **Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prior to Adoption of List of Issues[[4]](#footnote-4)**, Denmark and Greenland, 2019, there is a great lack of knowledge, data, and statistics about the social and economic conditions of indigenous peoples with disability. Tilioq, the politically independent National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities in Greenland, has collected testimonies and research[[5]](#footnote-5) in Greenland, and points out that:

* Children and youth with disability have difficulties accessing secondary education, and there is a lack of teachers in the schools, who are educated to teach children with disability.
* People with disability and families that get a child with disability often choose to move to Denmark, because of the low level of services provided in Greenland to people with disabilities.
* The doctors and psychiatrists, who make the mental health assessment for people with disability are often of Danish nationality. Thus, they do not speak Greenlandic and therefore, do not have the cultural understanding to make an accurate assessment of conditions.
* There is no law against discriminating people with disability in Greenland.

**Discrimination**

**In the status report about equal treatment[[6]](#footnote-6)**in Greenland, 2019, there is a focus on important issues for equal treatment and non-discrimination, i.e., inadequate legislation; the need to establish redress procedures for victims of discrimination; hate speech; and violence in close relationships. Hate speech and violence in close relationships are particularly important discrimination issues in Greenland and there is sparsity of Greenlandic legislation in the area.

It is also to be mentioned that in Annex I for the **Universal Periodic Review of Denmark**[[7]](#footnote-7), 2021, The Human Rights Council of Greenland has addressed issues in the following 7 areas:

* General protection against discrimination
* Violence in general and violence against children and women
* Access to justice
* Housing
* Natural resources
* Persons with disabilities
* Greenlanders in Denmark

**The Indigenous Child’s right to education**

The HRCG and ICC refers the UN study to the work of ICC’s Inuit Education Committee regarding the indigenous child’s right to education of the highest levels.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council is an international Indigenous Peoples’ Organization that represents all Inuit from the Arctic regions of Greenland, Alaska (USA), Canada, and Chukotka (Russia) on matters of international importance. Some of the principal goals are to strengthen unity among Inuit of the Circumpolar region, to promote Inuit rights and interests on the international level, and to work for international recognition of the human rights of all Indigenous Peoples[[8]](#footnote-8). In the following is a presentation of the work and goals of **ICC’s Inuit Education Committee.**

In 2018, the Inuit Circumpolar Council held the Inuit Education Summit, with participation from all four countries across Inuit Nunaat. The Summit recalled the ILO Convention No. 169 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirm the rights of Inuit to establish and control their educational systems and institutions appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. It further recalls that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that affirms children's rights to quality education of the highest levels, including Indigenous children.

Each Inuit region in Chukotka, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland have different colonial histories resulting in different educational challenges across the circumpolar Arctic. With that said, there are numerous similarities in what Inuit are facing. Educational institutions, grounded in Inuit shared culture, history, and world views, are essential starting points to share best educational practices, develop enhanced culturally appropriate curricula and learning resources, and jointly conceive and implement successful Inuit-focused educational policies.

ICC's Inuit Education Committee understands that there are ways to improve graduation rates, for example, through addressing cultural and linguistic disparities.   
Education in Inuit languages supports Inuit culture; Inuit hunting, gathering, and food practices, as Inuit culture is taught through language.

Language is not only the act of speaking. It is also to understand and express. Because Inuit communication is different from the foreign educators, language barriers between teacher and student often happen. A way to solve this issue would be to instruct foreign teachers how to communicate effectively with Inuit students, to ensure inclusiveness, of which without the educational requirements become unreachable for the student that needs the foundation of language. We need to increase the graduation rates in education so we can have better-thriving communities and peoples. This can be ensured through proper information access not just to Indigenous languages, but also foreign.   
  
As it is known, the education systems in use are usually not created by Indigenous peoples and are not made for Indigenous peoples. That is seen in curricula, that do not regard Indigenous knowledge as relevant or valuable, which directly impacts a young persons’ Indigenous identity. Later in life, this dynamic reflects on how Inuit as adults and parents pass on our Indigenous heritage to future generations. Many Inuit have parents who did not have the chance to learn their language. Many Inuit, if not all, have gone to schools where our language and culture are not included.

ICC acknowledge that Inuit-children are the ones that know their own lives best, thus we as adults recommend programs and activities are initiated locally, with the involvement of the children themselves. We can and should define what teacher credentialing processes and post-secondary requirements in teacher preservice programs should consist of, to ensure our worldview and perspectives is an integral part of Inuit education; and by doing that we can ensure the survival of our distinct identity as Inuit, prevent assimilation, and the destruction of our unique culture. That is what ICC’s Inuit Education Committee is working towards.

**Suicide prevention among youth in the Arctic**

The Human Rights Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Council refers the UN study to project **CREATeS[[9]](#footnote-9)**, as an example of suicide prevention in the Arctic.

Project CREATeS – Circumpolar Resilience, Engagement and Action Through Story – was collaboratively developed by the Inuit Circumpolar Council and the Arctic Council Sustainable Development Working Group [SDWG] co-leads. The project aims to engage community members, with a focus on youth, across Arctic States. There is an elevated rate of suicide across the Arctic, that disproportionately affect youth. Therefore, project CREATeS finds it important to ensure that Arctic youth experiences, perspectives, and ideas are reflected in suicide prevention and intervention efforts. The project’s hope is to stimulate a dialogue across the Arctic and engage youth in taking action for the prevention of suicide through creating a culturally safe space in which to talk and create stories out of their experiences. The project aims to create an opportunity and methods for community engagement and knowledge translation to support the suicide prevention and mental wellness efforts of the Arctic States, to sustain the circumpolar network that has been established through the Arctic Council in order to continue the collaboration and share best practices in suicide prevention. In addition, the project strives to broaden the circumpolar network to include more community members and youth.

The project has presented 8 key findings[[10]](#footnote-10) that all concern youth. HRCG and ICC highlights the following two:

* Some of the stories spoke either directly or indirectly of the importance of nurturing children, of the devastating impacts of adversity, and developmental trauma, including sexual assault, neglect, and being exposed to parental substance use.
* The youth stories were embedded in their respective ancestral lands, and all of the other strengths and protective factors, such as identity, belonging, language, culture, occupation, family, and community, etc., are linked in the stories to the land. Some youth expressed anxiety about the future if there is ongoing disruption and loss of traditional lands. Some of the youth living away from the land, such as in urban areas, found ways of making these environments meaningful and found meaning through ongoing connection to homelands.

**Children’s rights in Greenland**

Greenland has established several institutions with a specific focus on human rights. We see improvement in regard to understanding human rights. The children’s spokesperson’s institution has paved the way for methods that work in Greenland, as an Indigenous community, and the Government of Greenland has improved the legislation, particularly on children and persons with disabilities.

However, more work should be done to ensure triangulation of data, and that the government also takes more action and measures to truly implement and maintain a strong focus on all human rights of Indigenous persons and Indigenous peoples. The Human Rights Council of Greenland and Inuit Circumpolar Council support a stronger focus on the rights of the child.

**Regarding Indigenous people’s rights,** Greenland’s Human Rights Council and ICC are concerned about the lack of clarity by both the present Greenland Government and the Danish Government on the recognition and implementation of Indigenous peoples’ rights among the public and official governmental and non-governmental bodies in both Greenland and Denmark.

The Human Rights Council of Greenland has urged the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’ Mr. Calí Tzay to finalize the country visit to Greenland that was initiated by the previous UNSR. The HRCG and the ICC look forward to welcoming the Special Rapporteur to Greenland, once the COVID-19 situation permits, in order to share a diverse array of concerns about the status, rights and role of Inuit in Greenland.

**Concluding comments**

The Human Rights Council of Greenland and the Inuit Circumpolar have presented and listed some of the human’s right work in Greenland and Inuit Nunaat, that are responsive to our objective of ensuring respect for and recognition of the rights of the Indigenous child, and hereby refers EMRIPs Study on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to look into the issues and practices presented through the information provided.

As shown, the humans rights and the rights of Indigenous peoples are discussed and acted upon in Greenland and in the rest of Inuit Nunaat, as taboos are being broken. A framework for human rights work has been created in Greenland.

When that has been said, it is also clear that there is still a lot of work to be done in RESPECTING, PROTECTING, and PROMOTING the human rights and the rights of Indigenous peoples in Greenland and across Inuit Nunaat. We observe a general lack and therefore need to collect more data on conditions and developments in human rights issues, which we need in our work to act on the issues. We thank EMRIP to spread awareness and amplify the call to make durable changes.

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**ANNEX A**

*All the mentioned status reports are available on the website of the Human Rights Council of Greenland, and parallel reports to the UN on the Danish Institute for Human Right’s website. Status reports are in Greenlandic and Danish, with English summaries.*

*Publications and reports by MIO and Tilioq are to be found on each of their website and are mostly both in Greenlandic and Danish. We hope the UN study will consider a translator to access the full reports that lay background to some of the information provided in this document.*

*Project CREATeS has its own website in which the final report (English) is available.*

*For more information about the work of ICC’s Inuit Education Committee, please feel free to contact Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland.*

*Links are listed in the following.*

*Materials and links relevant to conditions in Alaska and Canada, are provided in the attached Annex B.*

Inuit Circumpolar Council:

<https://inuit.org/en/>

Human Rights Council Greenland:

<http://humanrights.gl/>

Tilioq: <https://tilioq.gl/en/>

<https://tilioq.gl/vidensbank/>

MIO: <https://mio.gl/?lang=en>

<https://mio.gl/videnscenter/?lang=da>

The Danish Institute of Human Righst:  
<https://www.humanrights.dk/>   
<https://menneskeret.dk/kalaallit-nunaat>

HRCG and DIHR reports:

Status report in children and youth in Greenland: <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/04_april_19/imr_status_bu_dk.pdf>

Status report about disability in Greenland: <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/imr_status_handicap_dk_2019.pdf>

Status report about equal treatment in Greenland: <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/04_april_19/imr_status_ligebehandling_dk.pdf>

Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prior to Adoption of List of Issues: <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/02_februar_19/report_to_the_un_committee_on_the_rights_of_persons_with_disabilities_prior_to_adoption_of_list_of_issues.pdf>

Recommendations pertaining to Greenland submitted by the Human Rights Council of Greenland the Danish Institute of Human Rights in relation to the Universal Periodic Review of Denmark: <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Anbefaling_GRM_UK.pdf>

Project CREATeS:  
 <https://www.projectcreates.com/about-project-creates>

<https://www.projectcreates.com/workshops-key-findings>

**ANNEX B**

In regard to additional, potentially useful materials from Alaska and Canada, please see the following links and attached documents.

**ALASKA – resources**

State of Alaska, Office of Children's Services, Indian Child Welfare

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/icwa/default.aspx>

Tribal State Collaboration Group

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/icwa/tscg/tscg.aspx>

CASEY FAMILY PROGRAM

Native American and Alaska Native Children Data Trends

<https://www.casey.org/resources/policy-resources/>

Alaska Children’s Trust

<https://www.alaskachildrenstrust.org/blog/2021/2/12/alaska-native-culture-keeps-alaska-native-children-safe?rq=Alaska%20Native%20children>

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Epicenter

<http://anthctoday.org/epicenter/>

KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER – select Alaska

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#AK/2/0/char/0>

ALASKA NATIVES AND AMERICAN INDIANS

--"Today over 3,000 children are in the Alaska foster care system. More than half of these children are Alaska Native. This disparity is unacceptable.”

SOURCE: <https://www.alaskachildrenstrust.org/blog/2021/2/12/alaska-native-culture-keeps-alaska-native-children-safe?rq=Alaska%20Native%20children>

--"According to multiple sources,61,62,73 the suicide rate is three to six times higher among American Indian and Alaska Native than among their non-Native peers and indeed represents one of the greatest health disparities faced by young American Indian and Alaska Natives.”

SOURCE: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2567901/>

--"COVID-19 exacerbates the effects of historical trauma on American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities. High death rates among Elders, parents, and extended family, who are central figures in preserving cultural traditions, threaten children’s ability to overcome adversity. Already at risk for low levels of school achievement, AIAN children are further threatened by school closures due to limited access to broadband services and technology, inadequate access to nutritious food and dedicated space to study at home. Systemic inequalities not only limit access to needed services but also result in the provision of low-quality education and health care, which worsens the negative impact of COVID-19. Policies that direct funds to provide children with culturally informed educational experiences and mental health services, ensure access to broadband and information technology, and honor AIAN families and communities will help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on AIAN children.”

SOURCE: <https://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/resources/FINAL_AddressingInequalities-AIAN_0.pdf>

**CANADA – resources**

An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families

<https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-92/royal-assent#ID0EZC>

An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.

[Assented to 21st June 2019]

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Natan Obed column on children

<https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/On-Universal-Childrens-Day-we-must-speak-up-address-child-sexual-abuse-The-Hill-Times.pdf>

Systemic Discrimination in the Provision of Healthcare in Inuit Nunangat A Brief Discussion Paper January 2021

<https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/20210122-ITK-Systemic-Discrimination-in-the-Provision-of-Healthcare-in-Inuit-Nunangat.pdf>

**GLOBAL resources**

Global incidence of suicide among Indigenous peoples: a systematic review

<https://bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12916-018-1115-6.pdf>

1. <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/04_april_19/imr_status_bu_dk.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://mio.gl/?lang=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/imr_status_handicap_dk_2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/02_februar_19/report_to_the_un_committee_on_the_rights_of_persons_with_disabilities_prior_to_adoption_of_list_of_issues.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://tilioq.gl/en/> / <https://tilioq.gl/vidensbank/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/04_april_19/imr_status_ligebehandling_dk.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Anbefaling_GRM_UK.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://inuit.org/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.projectcreates.com/about-project-creates> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.projectcreates.com/workshops-key-findings> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)