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THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Needed: an official guardian

By Sheila Watt-Cloutier
From Saturday's Globe and Mail

Climate change, pollution, foreign encroachment – Arctic Canada has many problems, Inuit activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier says in the region's first LaFontaine-Baldwin lecture. But she has a solution: Leave it to the people whose livelihood is tied to the land of ice and snow to safeguard its future

As a wealthy nation with a privileged history, we have an obligation to lead on the global stage. Our government must return to the international negotiating table that it left years ago, for a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol that will hopefully conclude this December in Copenhagen. This treaty may well offer the last best hope for us to come together to reduce and eliminate greenhouse-gas emissions before the changes spiral beyond our control. In this effort, Northern cultures must be more than simply window dressing.

As the world is once again attracted to the Arctic's resources, again our government's decisions are affecting Inuit. As the Northwest Passage sea-ice coverage is lost, Canada is pressed to defend its sovereignty over the fabled passage. Instead of aggressively facing climate change and becoming an international leader, however, Canada has decided the best way to keep foreign ships from running the passage is with our military. Canada, a peaceful nation, will posture and even threaten those who attempt a free passage through our islands.

Canada should take a more principled and human-centred approach: peaceful, co-operative management of the Arctic, perhaps by means of new multilateral institutions, or a greatly expanded role for the Arctic Council. I believe we must work hard to avoid creating yet another region where relationships between nations are tense. The Arctic is one of the last peaceful and pristine places in the world. We all must realize that thriving, human communities will speak more strongly to our Arctic sovereignty than any fleet of icebreakers or barracks full of soldiers.

How can Canada ensure the peaceful use of the Arctic and allow respect for human rights to radiate from the circumpolar North? I propose revitalizing an old idea with a “made-

in-Canada” notion that was born in our Northern land claims: an Arctic treaty that charges circumpolar indigenous peoples with the stewardship of the Arctic for the continued benefit of humankind, through co-management. International co-man-

agement boards would integrate traditional and scientific knowledge to ensure sound and peaceful management of the Arctic's natural resources.

This model would represent a significant change from our nation's current "use it or lose it" philosophy to Arctic development, and instead embrace the vision of a sustainable Arctic economy developed in partnership with a carefully managed Arctic ecosystem.

This vision has been embraced at a UN gathering of nations in Iceland, which found that Arctic nations either need to begin fulfilling their stewardship obligations, or a whole new treaty system may be necessary for Arctic preservation.

Inuit have much to offer our fellow Canadians, and are ideally positioned to show the world a model of sustainable development and environmental management in the region that connects all nations around the globe.

I am not saying we ought to halt all economic development. Rather, we must retake real control over that development by insisting that every opportunity and program be systematically analyzed against its impact on our world, meaning the greenhouse gases it will emit, the unsustainable cycles it will feed, and the lasting impact it will make on our delicate landscape and the health of our people. This mature innovation, which recognizes the full costs and benefits behind our actions, can still produce healthy profits, but will do so in a manner far more sustainable than the thoughtless development of our past.

Historically, our sustainable way of life was based upon seeing what needs to be done and doing it without being told what to do. I believe we can return to this system, but we must step away from dependency on our government; I hope that the rest of Canada will aid us in this effort.

This article is adapted from the ninth annual LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture, delivered last night in Iqaluit by Inuit activist and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize nominee Sheila Watt-Cloutier.



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