

### Live Webcast of NIRB Mary River Hearings

**Montreal, January 22, 2014** – Digital Indigenous Democracy, IsumaTV and Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk will provide online radio and TV coverage of the second round of Public Hearings on the Baffinland Iron Mine Mary River Environmental Review from Pond Inlet, Nunavut, January 27 to 31. The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) is holding new public consultations to assess Baffinland's revised Early Revenue Phase Proposal.

Baffinland's original proposal, including building a 150 km railway south from the Baffin Island mine site to a deep water port on Foxe Basin, was approved by the NIRB in September 2012, following ten days of Public Hearings in Iqaluit, Igloolik and Pond Inlet. However, in December 2012 Baffinland drastically scaled down their plan and now seeks approval to transport 85% less iron ore by road north to the Inuit community of Pond Inlet on Baffin Bay.

These hearings are likely to be more contentious than the first round in 2012. Both the Hamlet of Pond Inlet and the community's Hunters and Trappers Organization, as well as two individuals from the community, have filed formal interventions. Apparently people are not happy with how the company has been behaving in the past 18 months since the first round of hearings.

As Kunuk explains: "Yes, that's why we are going to film this show. Pond Inlet people are more aggressive, not like Igloolikmiut. Igloolikmiut intend to make it happen and learn from it. I'm thinking Pond people take out the bat and I want to capture that."

Starting January 27 at 9 am EST, IsumaTV will stream live Inuktitut and English audio each day from the hearings through Igloolik's online radio hub at [www.isuma.tv/DID/radio/igloolik](http://www.isuma.tv/DID/radio/igloolik). Every evening from 8 to 10 pm EST, Kunuk will host a live TV talk show to discuss issues raised at the hearings with community members and participants in the hearings. Live coverage as well as additional footage from the hearings will be available at [www.isuma.tv/DID/Live/NIRBMaryRiverHearings](http://www.isuma.tv/DID/Live/NIRBMaryRiverHearings).

Both the live audio from the hearings and Kunuk's evening show will also be broadcast by IsumaTV through local community radio channels and IsumaTV television network in Arviat, Cambridge Bay, Igloolik and Taloyoak.

Digital Indigenous Democracy is a project of IsumaTV funded by the Canada Media Fund Experimental Stream and Nunavut Independent TV Network, with support from the Government of Nunavut Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth.

IsumaTV is an indigenous, interactive, multimedia website with over 5,000 films and videos online in 56 languages. IsumaTV was launched in January 2008 by Isuma Distribution International, as a partnership with Nunavut Independent Television Network (NITV), imagineNATIVE Film+Media Arts Festival, Vtape, Native Communications Society of the NWT and Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc., producers of the award-winning Inuit-language feature films: *Atanarjuat The Fast Runner*, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, and *Before Tomorrow*.

- 30 -

For more information contact:

Zacharias Kunuk, 867-934-8725, [zkunuk@isuma.ca](mailto:zkunuk@isuma.ca)

Norman Cohn, 514-576-0707, [cohn@isuma.ca](mailto:cohn@isuma.ca)



## BACKGROUND

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL** 

January 17, 2014

### Celebrated son of Igloolik creates cultural Internet for his people

By ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

*In once-isolated communities across Nunavut, acclaimed filmmakers Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn have launched an ambitious broadcasting project that is empowering citizens to tell their stories, share their wisdom, and take a firmer hand in guarding their language, their culture – and their future*

*This is part of [The North](#)<sup>1</sup>, a Globe investigation of unprecedented change to the climate, culture and politics of Canada's last frontier. Join the conversation with [#GlobeNorth](#)<sup>2</sup>*

Zacharias Kunuk was born in a sod hut, in a little gathering of seven huts that sheltered a total of 80 or 90 people. "We were living on the land traditionally, like our forefathers," says the director of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. "I thought we were the whole world out there."

But when he was 9, his family moved into a government matchbox house in Igloolik, he was sent to school, and his experience of purely traditional life was over. Kunuk felt bereft, but he also discovered movies, at a cinema where you could see John Wayne westerns for a quarter. It was the start of what would eventually become one of Canada's most remarkable and celebrated film careers.

The town that seemed bafflingly urban to the nine-year-old Kunuk is now awash in southern cable TV, and stands in the path of an unprecedented rush for Northern treasure that could surround it with a dozen new resource projects. The pressure of change has increased exponentially, but this time Kunuk has the means and the experience to do something to protect the lifestyle and language he was born into, and even to strengthen them.

Two years ago, Igloolik became the first site for an innovative Internet broadcasting project that Kunuk and his partner Norman Cohn hope will help birth a new wave of grassroots filmmaking in 10 Nunavut communities. It's called Digital Indigenous Democracy (DID), and it could have a big impact on the use of indigenous languages in digital media and on how isolated Northerners understand – and perhaps alter – the futures being dreamt for them in office towers in Calgary and Toronto.

"We're trying to build an Internet that people can use in their own oral languages, and to do that, it has to work audiovisually," says Cohn. Isuma TV, an arm of a film company co-founded by Kunuk, Cohn and two others in 1990, got the project started with a one-time, \$1-million "supergrant" from the Canada Media Fund's experimental stream. "Internet service in remote communities in Canada's North are at least 100 times behind what you've got in Toronto, in cost per kilobyte, and that's going to get worse, not better. It may be 200 times worse next year, and that's fatal."

Fatal, he says, because a low-bandwidth Internet forces Northerners to communicate through text, which even for people who are fluent speakers of Inuktitut often means English.

An audiovisual Internet offers the best chance (along with radio) for people in Cambridge Bay or Pond Inlet to discuss, in their own oral languages, the mine that someone may want to open on their doorstep. "Zacharias is a language warrior in his artistic and political practice," says Cohn. "But when he e-mails his grandchildren, he has to do it in English. Languages that have survived 4,000 years, through whalers, traders, priests, government, residential schools and cable TV, will not survive 20 years of a literary Internet forcing everybody to communicate in their second language."

Arviat, a hamlet on the western shore of Hudson Bay, is home to only 825 people, but it has its own film society, and everyone in it is either making films or learning how to. Until recently, however, the main way to share a video in Arviat was to put it on YouTube, which hardly anyone in the North has the bandwidth to watch on a regular basis. "Eighty dollars buys very little video Internet," notes Jordan Konek, a young Arviat filmmaker who recently moved to Iqaluit. In Nunavut, \$80 will get you a connection that tops out at 1/10th the speed of a middling southern plan, with about one-third the bandwidth.

By installing a relatively cheap DID media player, people in Arviat, Igloodik and eight other remote communities can locally stream high-speed programs from among the 5,000 in the Isuma catalogue, from hunting videos made on the ice last week to full-length films like *Atanarjuat*, which won the Caméra d'Or at the 2001 Cannes film festival. Local filmmakers can upload their own work, which ultimately becomes available across the Isuma network, which also extends to indigenous communities outside Canada.

"The *entire* community watches," says Jamie Bell of Arviat's Nunavut Arctic College, in an e-mail exchange. "It's like 1950 and TV is new for the first time."

"We were hoping one day to start a TV station," says Paul Inoe, a member of the Arviat Film Society and one of the volunteers who keep the project running. "Isuma basically gave us that wish. They have given us a lot of content to play with, and an avenue to show our work."

The current, community-curated Arviat playlist includes videos of last summer's Rockin' Walrus Arts Festival in Igloodik; the recent Kunuk documentary *Inuit Cree Reconciliation*; and Madeline Ivalu's 2007 film *Umiaq*, about a group of elders who decide to build a traditional sealskin-covered boat. The playlists change, but the content is overwhelmingly about Northern lifestyle and language – two things that the resource rush stands to change drastically.

"We're experimenting with how you can cross not just a digital divide, but a divide in perception and world view," Cohn says. "To have the [resource] debate all in the extraction language, rather than in the land language, already makes it a lopsided debate. You have very limited ways in which local opinions can be expressed. [DID] can completely change the rules of the participation game, the way the Berger Inquiry did in the Northwest Territories 40 years ago, when it levelled the playing field between indigenous communities and the Alaska pipeline." It's not enough, he says, to write information pamphlets in Inuktitut syllabics, which were invented by missionaries as a way to teach the Bible and aren't widely understood among people under 60.

It can be tricky to set up a DID channel in a small place that you can't reach by road and that is seldom visited by cable technicians who may be based in Winnipeg. A media player was installed in a public library in an Arctic Bay school last summer, for example, but in October the library abruptly moved to a different location, and there was no one around who could move the service, which will probably stay down until spring. "When it's minus 40, you may not want one of your guys climbing a pole to attach a cable," says Stéphane Rituit, a producer at Isuma TV's Montreal office.

In Arviat, the connection was delayed while Isuma worked out the contractual details with cable provider Arctic Co-ops, which balked at the idea of letting local people ("third parties," in contract language) upload their own content directly to the system.

"My biggest frustration was to ask Arviat to slow down," says Rituit. "You get people totally enthusiastic. They say, 'Hey, let's do it, go live on air, play music,' and then you have to call them and say, 'I'm sorry, guys, actually we can't do

that,' " – because it wasn't in the cable contract. More recently, uploads in Arviat have been stalled by a technical glitch that Rituit is trying to sort out from Montreal via Skype.

Digital Indigenous Democracy got started after Kunuk made a formal intervention at the 2012 hearings into the proposed Baffinland iron mine at Mary River, at which he presented 71 Isuma call-in radio shows and video interviews about the proposal. He argued that this kind of multimedia conversation was key to the legal obligation to inform and consult with indigenous people. Isuma did live audio broadcasts of the hearings in Igloolik and Pond Inlet, allowing anyone to listen to proceedings that are usually restricted to bureaucrats and industry reps. The licence for the Baffinland mine ultimately included conditions mandating multimedia consultation throughout the project. (Isuma will broadcast a second round of Baffinland hearings from Jan. 27 to 31, with evening talk shows about each day's proceedings hosted by Kunuk.)

That summer, the Kitikmeot Inuit Association asked Isuma to set up community channels in Cambridge Bay and Taloyoak, where mining activity is heating up. Julia Ogina, KIA programs co-ordinator, says four or five filmmakers in Cambridge Bay have been trained to make broadcast-ready content with community-owned equipment. "It started with the idea of getting our languages and culture more into the home," she says, referring both to Inuktitut and to Inuinnaqtun, a dialect spoken around Taloyoak.

She knows people are watching, because the moment something goes wrong with the feed, the station's Facebook page fills up with complaints. The current playlist in Cambridge Bay includes a show about walrus hunting in the Baffinland mine area and *Picture of Light*, Peter Mettler's 1994 documentary about the northern lights.

Cohn says DID is inexpensive and scalable, and could extend into any number of indigenous communities here and abroad, if money and volunteers are available. One source of future funding could be the resource companies themselves. "One million dollars doesn't go very far if you're thinking about 10 communities, or all 26 Nunavut communities, or all the Northern communities that could or should be wired into this network," he says. "But we've been counting out the pennies and wondering if we can meet next week's payroll, for the last 25 years."

## References

1. [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north)
2. <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23globenorth&src=typd>

The Globe and Mail, Inc.



The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing [http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx\\_id=16387403](http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx_id=16387403) into any web browser. The Globe and Mail, Inc. and The Globe and Mail logos are registered trademarks of The Globe and Mail, Inc. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.