

Aglukkaq says activists hurt Inuit ability to feed families

Health minister says UN food official "ill-informed" and "a bit patronizing"

By Laura Payton, [CBC News](#)

Posted: May 16, 2012 5:02 PM ET

Last Updated: May 16, 2012 10:06 PM ET

122

A federal cabinet minister slammed activist groups who she says interfere in Inuit traditions, blaming them for food security problems in the North.

Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq, who's from a hamlet in Nunavut called Gjoa Haven, met with a UN food security official on Wednesday, but said he didn't understand the real problems faced by the Inuit. She said environmentalists and activists were the problem behind any food insecurity.

"He's ill-informed. I found it a bit patronizing and [just] another academic studying us from afar who's going to make comments about the challenges that we have," Aglukkaq said following her meeting with Olivier De Schutter, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food.

Food security, she said, is "about the fights that we have with groups like [the] European Union that want to stop the seal hunt and/or [the] Pew Foundation who wants to put a moratorium on fishing and/or the polar bear activists."

"We continue to live off the land, eat the seal meat, eat the polar bear meat and whatnot. And the collective implications of environmentalists, activists, whether it be the fish plus the seal plus the bear, leaves very little for us as Inuit and Aboriginal people of Canada's Arctic with very little to eat."

"It's about fighting environmentalists that try and put a stop to our way of life, our way of life and hunting, to provide for our families," Aglukkaq said.

"So it was important that [De Schutter] understood from the circumpolar region the implications of the activist groups that are outside of Canada that try and stop these [traditions] and the impact it has on Inuit people in the circumpolar region."

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney and Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird also criticized De Schutter for spending time in a rich country rather than in one where more people are starving.

'Activist groups' include Coca-Cola

The Pew Foundation says on its website that to protect life in the Arctic, "we must first and foremost work to lower carbon emissions that are the major cause of global warming."

The Conservative government has been criticized by scientists for not doing enough to lower carbon emissions in Canada, eschewing international agreements and moving sector-by-sector to place limits on emissions, leaving the most controversial emitters to the end of 2012.

The organization released a letter last month from 2,000 scientists in 67 countries, 60 per cent of whom are from one of the countries bordering the Arctic, which called for a moratorium on commercial fishing until there's an international agreement on how to manage the ocean that's opened up as permanent sea ice melts.

Pressed for more information, a spokesman for Aglukkaq also pointed to Coca-Cola as an offender. The company has pushed for an end to the polar bear hunt, Steve Outhouse told CBC News.

The company's project, in conjunction with WWF Canada, aimed to preserve polar bear habitat.

David Moran, a spokesman for Coca-Cola, said he was concerned about Outhouse's comments.

"Our effort is intended to integrate scientific research with local expertise and their cultural values in order to help design an effective adaptation and survival plan for polar bears while protecting the cultural heritage and economic needs of local peoples," Moran said in a statement.

Aglukkaq wouldn't say whether she agreed with De Schutter's conclusion that some Canadians have trouble affording or accessing food.

"I don't know how he can make a conclusion. He's not even set foot in my region. Again, I say, you know, he's another academic who is studying our way of life from afar," she said.

Seal products ban 'very negative' for Inuit

De Schutter didn't visit the Canadian Arctic, but said he spent time in remote First Nations communities in Alberta and northern Manitoba.

Aglukkaq said she started the meeting by showing De Schutter a map of Canada.

"We don't have farms in Canada's Arctic because it's the Arctic and that should be obvious, one would assume."

Mary Simon, head of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization representing the Inuit, agreed with De Schutter's call for a national food strategy at a press conference Wednesday. She also took aim at the European Union over its seal products ban, which she said affected northerners in a "very negative way."

Almost 70 per cent of Inuit households in Nunavut were found to be food insecure in a recent population health survey, Simon said, six times more than Canadian national average.

"This is not acceptable in the Canada that I live in. It is posing a serious risk to Inuit wellbeing," she said.

Aglukkaq's spokesman said Simon and Aglukkaq often disagree, and that Simon represents a group that is based in Ottawa.

Simon is in her second term as the elected leader of the Inuit in Canada.