

Press Release - 21 July 2007

INUIT LEADER TO GIVE EVIDENCE AGAINST AIRPORT EXPANSION AT STANSTED PUBLIC INQUIRY

The Leader of Greenland's indigenous human rights organisation the Inuit Circumpolar Council and expert member of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Aqqaluk Lyngé, will give evidence this week (on Friday 27 July) to the Public Inquiry into the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport.

Speaking as a witness for campaign group Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE), Mr Lyngé will highlight the impacts of climate change which are already being experienced in the Arctic and call for a halt to the airport expansion proposals which would add to the global warming burden which is already affecting the traditional Inuit way of life.

Earlier in the week (Wednesday 25 July) he will address MPs at the Houses of Parliament about the frontline impacts of climate change.

"Climate change is not just a theory to us in the Arctic; it is a stark and dangerous reality. Human-induced climate change is undermining the ecosystem upon which Inuit depend for their physical and cultural survival," says Mr Lyngé.

"You may say that the expansion of London Stansted Airport will play only a small part in increasing climate change but everyone can say that about almost everything they do. It is an excuse for doing nothing. The result of that attitude would be catastrophic. The serious consequences affecting my people today will affect your people tomorrow," he will warn.

In February 2003, the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) passed a resolution effectively recognizing the Arctic as a "barometer" or "indicator region" of the globe's environmental health. This resolution called upon Arctic states to significantly increase environmental monitoring arrangements in the Arctic.

"The Arctic is no longer isolated from the rest of the world," Mr Lyngé will tell the Inquiry. "What happens in countries such as Britain affects us in the North. Many of the economic and environmental challenges facing the Inuit result from activities well to the south of our homeland and Inuit traditions are being severely tested by the changing Arctic environment."

"The Inuit people and the Arctic are sometimes overlooked, but in relation to global climate change I suggest you do so at your peril. What is happening now to Inuit will happen soon to you in the South. This is why the UNEP is looking to the Arctic and why you should as well."

Commenting ahead of Mr Lyngé's appearance, SSE Campaign Director Carol Barbone said: "Stansted will be the litmus test of the seriousness of the Government's commitment to properly tackling the climate change issue. If Gordon Brown doesn't grasp that nettle then his claims about acting to address global warming will be exposed as mere platitudes."

BAA is seeking unlimited passenger use of the airport's single runway, currently capped at 25 million passengers per annum, which could result in the eventual doubling passenger throughput and an increase in the number of flights from 192,000 (latest 12 months total) to 264,000 annually. Permission for the application was refused by Uttlesford District Council last November and the Public Inquiry is hearing BAA's appeal against that decision.

The Inquiry is currently set to conclude on 19 October, following which the Inspector will submit a report and recommendation to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Secretary of State for Transport for decision. An announcement is expected in Spring 2008.

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