

**Talking Points - Minister Leona Aglukkaq
for her 2009 EVE Award (Ottawa) acceptance speech**

- Thank you. It is such a pleasure to be here with you today/tonight. Thank you to Equal Voice for awarding me this honour.

- There are many successful women leaders in Canada today, and it is important to recognize their accomplishments. As such, I would also like to acknowledge the Right Honourable Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister, who will also receive an EVE Award this month.

- Some would say that having been born along the Arctic coast in a small outpost camp, like so many Inuit women of my generation, and with Inuktitut as a first language, would not be considered an easy place for a career in politics. However, for me - it instilled in me a true sense of what was important and grounded me in traditional values which have kept me strong, and which continue to guide me even today.
- For example, *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq* means respect for others, which has taught me to listen to and respect different opinions and perspectives, even if I don't always agree - a value which arguably serves me well in my career today!

- Growing up, I was also surrounded by strong women who taught me that I could be anything I wanted to be, if I worked hard enough. Inuit women have always played a powerful role as informal leaders in their families and communities. Nellie Courvoysa was one of those women- She was the first female premier of any Canadian Territory - I watched her everyday when I was a 14 year old page working in the nwt legislative assembly (while living in yellowknife attending high school - residential school) - Nellie's hard work inspired me to consider entering a political career.

- I have been lucky to experience working in many different levels of government throughout my career. When I was first starting out in the public service, I began at the municipal level, serving on my local Hamlet Council in the Northwest Territories.

- That experience reaffirmed my commitment to listening to the voices of the people I serve, and ensuring that work always moves ahead to address their needs. We have many challenges in the North, some of which I have experienced personally, some which I encountered in my career.

- We have the highest levels of violence against women in the country, high suicide levels, substance abuse, poverty, a high cost of living, and not enough housing. Encountering these issues strengthened my resolve to make a difference.
- One of the defining moments in my career came 10 years ago this month. I was working for the Government of the Northwest Territories, and based in Iqaluit, which overnight became the capital of our new Nunavut territory.
- I was able to contribute to the structure of Canada's newest government by leading the Decentralization Secretariat, implementing the plan to spread much needed government jobs and regional offices across the territory. Being part of that change was a remarkable learning experience for me, and formed the basis of my interest to pursue a political career. It taught me that change truly can happen, if you work hard enough for it.

- Nunavut celebrated its 10th birthday last week— Many positive developments have happened in Nunavut since its birth in 1999, and I am proud to say that I was involved in moving work forward on some of them. Now, as Member of Parliament for Nunavut, Canada's Minister of Health, and Minister Responsible for the North, I can continue to work on some of the issues I addressed while in territorial politics, and I cannot tell you how gratifying that is.

- Looking back, as Nunavut continued to grow and develop, so did I. I worked my way up in the public service, broadening my experience by taking on roles across government. When I led the department of Culture, Language, Elders, and Youth, I truly enjoyed working on the issues that are so tied to our northern identity.

- It was a big decision for me to enter politics, but it was a natural choice because I knew I wanted to contribute, and had a strong connection to the public I wanted to represent. When I was first elected to the Nunavut Legislative Assembly in 2004, I was one of only two women, but we were both voted straight into Executive Council. I suddenly I found myself holding the portfolio of Finance and becoming House Leader.

- Life changed overnight for me. Of course there were challenges, but I believed then, and I still believe now, that it is the job of elected officials to take responsibility and make tough decisions, and I did.

- In the Government of Nunavut's I served just over four years and assigned to hold the portfolios of Health, Finance and the Status of Women, issues I am very passionate about. In a sense, many of the issues surrounding women in Nunavut can be tied back to health.

- I am a true believer in a prevention and promotion of health and wellness, and to look at broader social determinants of health. For women in Nunavut, there is a number of issues which need to be addressed in order for them to have a good quality of life and enjoy equality in all aspects of their lives.

- To be Minister Responsible for the Status of Women meant I was able to move some of these issues forward and ensure that women's priority needs were being addressed.
- Of course, one issue that is crucial in this area is leadership. In discussions with other Status of Women Ministers at the time, I could see that it was one of the issues that is shared across jurisdictions.
- As MP for Nunavut, my constituents are served by only one woman in territorial politics today. Granted, that woman is, in fact, the Premier, but we continue to see a lack of female representation in politics. In my term as territorial Minister, it was only me and one other woman at the table.

- Now at the federal level, I am proud to say that there are 69 women in the House of Commons, and 11 of them join me at the Cabinet table. This is certainly a step in the right direction. I have experienced in my own career - and we all know this - that when women's voices are missing from the table, issues that affect women's lives are not properly addressed.
- As I stand here today to accept this award, and talk about my own experiences, allow me a few moments to question: why are there still so few women in politics, and what can we do to change this?

■ During my time as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women in Nunavut, this was an issue I actively addressed. We created a Women's Voices in Leadership program which partnered with women's groups and organizations throughout Nunavut, encouraging women to become active leaders. One of the great successes we had was a *Women and Elections Forum* which we held last year before the territorial elections.

■ I am proud to say that one of the women participating was Eva Aariak, who is now, of course, Premier of Nunavut. That is quite an accomplishment. I would have been there myself to speak had I not gone into labour that day with my son, Cooper – I remember being very disappointed I could not be there, and one of the organizers joked that I should attend, as that would set such a great example for the women there: that you could, in fact, be a leader and run for office – even while in labour!

- All joking aside, women still encounter barriers when seeking elected office, such as stereotyping, outdated perceptions of what women's roles and abilities are, and a lack of support. Education is critical for women to make informed choices about their lives and careers. Women need role models, mentoring, and encouragement to take that step to be politically active on issues that affect their lives. That is why I commend Equal Voice and the work you do.

- I especially want to acknowledge you for your new program, *Experiences*, which supports young women and girls to consider a life in politics, and to run in elections. I have always been a firm believer in giving youth a voice and the opportunities they need, and have actively encouraged youth in Nunavut to sit on boards such as the Status of Women Council, or participate in the Youth Parliament. We need to encourage young women from an early age that they can accomplish these things.

■ I would like to accept this award on behalf of my late friend Sylvia Iyall (my former executive secretary) who was killed by her common law husband - domestic violence. This was a special woman in my life and I want her memory to be honoured by all the women who continue to stand up against violence.

■ I would also like to acknowledge the countless women who have gone before me and who I consider to be true trailblazers – especially the Aboriginal women in this country, who might not always have had the recognition they deserved in life, but who have been true changemakers, for their families, their communities, and their people. They need to be celebrated for their successes and honoured for their accomplishments. For me, I am thinking of my own role models, my mother, Miriam Aglukkaq, Nellie Courvoysier and Mary Simon, President of ITK. It is in their honour, that I stand here today and accept this award. I would also like to thank my husband Robbie and my son Cooper their support throughout my career.

■ Thank you / Qujannamiik.