National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part 1 Public Hearings

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Rankin Inlet, Nunavut

Tuesday February 20, 2018

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Micah Arreak & Jeannie Arreak-Qullualik, In relation to Ningiuq Tungaaluk, Deborah Evaluarjuk, Reepa Arreak, Vivian Sula Enuaraq, Alexandra Degrasse & Aliyah Degrasse

Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson
Commission Counsel: Lillian Lundrigan

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--- Upon commencing on Tuesday, February 20, 2018 at 15:20

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Good afternoon, Micah. Do you swear that the evidence you will give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

MS. MICAH ARREAK: I do.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Thank you.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking in Inuktitut) Thank you, Micah, for being here and being able to give your statement. The things that you want to talk about today -- can you let us know who they are? Your grandmother, Reepa; Deborah; your daughter and your grandchildren; are these the ones that you want to talk about?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: (Speaking in Inuktitut) In the beginning, let me say, I was born and I was given A51772. Us Inuit born before 1970, we were given numbers. And I have a number, it’s A51772. I was born in Talurjuaq. My father was a special constable over 20 years up in the High Arctic. And every two years, because he was a special constable, he would have to move to a different community. Because of that, three of us were born in one area, then we moved to Iglulik. And when we moved there, Deborah, that I’m going to talk about, she
was my younger sister. She was adopted in Iglulik, to Mark Evaluarjuk.

My younger sister, Deborah Evaluarjuk, I’m going to briefly mention her. And in the beginning, I will be talking about my grandmother, my mother’s mother, Tungaaluk. Her name was Martha Tungaaluk, however, my mother’s mother, before I was born, she was sent down south because of tuberculosis to a sanatorium. And she passed away down there and she was buried in Winnipeg.

We couldn’t find her for a long time and never came back home. My other grandmother, Lekea (phon) Panapakachuk (phon), they were roommates. However my grandmother, my mother’s mother, went to Winnipeg and she was buried in Winnipeg. And they never informed us, only when the ships came up, we got that information. It was a while before we were informed of her death.

And I haven’t seen Martha Tungaaluk’s grave; I never seen her. Only my mother used to tell stories about her. When my mother was alive, she wanted us to find her body, and I found it. However, it’s in Winnipeg, and they were moved to Moose Jaw; from Moose Jaw and buried in Winnipeg on Indian land. And we’ve heard different stories. I haven’t seen the gravesite myself.

My mother was able to go down, but she got sick with cancer, so she couldn’t go down anymore. Her
younger sisters went to go see the gravesite. But today, I
feel it today, because she was my grandmother, even though
I never seen her. But she left for treatment for
tuberculosis. I feel the pain. I was wondering how she
was treated.

In the past, when they were sent down, some
of them would be sent to the West or to Nunatil (phon) in
Labrador. And they used to be sent there instead. Some of
them used to make it all the way home up to the High
Arctic, but I hear every now and again, because I’ve been
on the WWIWIG, when I hear, I still feel the pain.

The doctors, because they were not treated
properly by the doctors. And when I hear that, or the
graves, they were just stacked in one grave. So when we
went to go see her grave, we went to a different area.
They were numbers. They were all A5 numbers. But their
gravesite, there’s no markers on a lot of them.

And this is a source of pain for a lot of
Inuit today. I know they were ancestors. Something that I
wanted to touch on.

A lot of us Inuit, before our time, were
treated badly. And we still feel it today. I finished
talking about her.

My mother, when she cries and we ask her why
she was feeling that way, she would pretend not to cry.
She’s missing her mother.

When it was in the television, in the 1990s, when they were going on the news, we finally found her body. We didn’t want her body sent back up.

Our way of thinking was, Inuit traditional knowledge states that people that are buried should not be taken out of the ground, because their sickness might be contagious. Because of that, the family wanted her to stay down, buried in Winnipeg. At least we know where her grave is. It made us feel a little bit more relaxed when we found her. I finished that portion.

And Reepa, more recently, she passed away in Iqaluit. We know that she was murdered. However, they diagnosed her as a suicide. There’s her picture up there. That’s our uncle, Pijamanik (phon); that’s his daughter in Iqaluit, 2006 I think, around that time. When we’re trying to forget some things, we forget some details of the days, especially when things happened.

My father was the constable for many years. He would investigate suicide and murders. He knew that she did not commit suicide. However, the police in Iqaluit said that she committed suicide. This is something that we feel pain for, it’s all our family that feels that way. I know her, my cousin Pijamanik is a pastor for many, many years, and he says she is with God now. Everyone that’s
murdered goes straight to Heaven, so that’s where we left it at.

But we do feel the pain of her loss by our family. I know you can’t forget their birthdays and they have namesakes. Around 2006 or 2007, they said she committed suicide. However she was there for computer training with Arctic College. She had an apartment, she was happy; and they said she committed suicide, even though she was enjoying her time there.

They found her in her apartment on her knees, in the shower. Because she was tall. With a shoelace -- someone tied it around her neck, and she was kneeling down in the shower, and she was tied up. And that’s how they found her. It was tied to the shower head and then to her neck. When we saw that, the noose around her neck, there was a line over here -- there were two lines; it looked like, my father said it looked like she was hit with it first and then choked. There were two different lines on her neck.

We knew that her boyfriend killed her. And his other boot had no lace. They never considered that even. And a lot of people have been treated that way. They say they committed suicide when they didn’t commit suicide. Because they don’t do a proper investigation. The ones that are said to have committed suicide, they have
to reinvestigate them again. Don’t exhume them, but to
reinvestigate them and change the outcome.

And my younger sister, Deborah Evaluarjuk,
last year she passed away. When we were down in St. John’s
for a meeting and when I passed through Ottawa, I would go
see her. I was going to go see her on my way back, and
that would have been the last time to see her. I knew she
could never be happy. I didn’t know that was going to be
the last time I was going to see her alive.

As I mentioned, she was adopted. The
biological relatives, we had no say, because it was the
custom with us as Inuit -- we don’t cremate our dead.
That’s not our culture. After three days they cremated
her. That is something that we’re not happy with. When
Inuit pass away in the South, they should not be cremated.
Some of them, when they are treated badly, they try to get
rid of the evidence and cremate them.

They should not cremate Inuit, it’s not our
culture to do that. I know, the people that are going to
pass away in the future, they should not be cremated right
away. As long as they investigate what happened. Whether
they’re adopted, the family members, not just the family
members that adopted her, the biological family members,
should be asked.

And when they pass away down South, if they
are from the North, because they have paid their taxes from
the very beginning, we were paying our taxes. And when
they pass away in the South, I wonder how we can have them
delivered to their home community to be buried.

The family members that lost their family,
they end up paying for it and it creates a hardship. This
is something that we have to address. She was my younger
sister, Deborah. Last year she passed away on our way back
from St. John’s. We had a memorial for her and then we
shipped her to Iglulik and buried her there.

As well, my daughter; for a long time,
something that we’d been planning for -- I felt relaxed.
Many, many years, I was going to talk about it. But it has
helped me, I want to say thank you. You seemed to know
beforehand, you already -- my support system and I can talk
freely.

I would like to apologize that some people
will not be that way. Some of them are going to have a
hard time speaking. But myself, I’m aware of what is
happening so I am able to talk about it. It’s easier for
me now.

My daughter. In 2011, June 7, she passed
away. I named her Vivian, but she didn’t want to be
Vivian. She was a very nice person. We hear that if
they’re going to have a short life, they’re going to be a
very nice person. Only the good die young. She was a very
nice person, very welcoming.

And she was a midwife. When she was a
midwife, however, she passed away when she was working at
the Baffin Correctional Centre. She was a casual there.
She, a lot of us Inuit don’t really care about the money,
but we are looking for the truth. We have to look for the
truth.

My daughter. I know I am told by many
people when she passed away in Iqaluit. I am from Iglulik,
that’s where I lived at the time. I heard it on the
computer, on Facebook. It said “Rest in Peace” to her. I
know a lot of people know me in Iqaluit, I have friends
there and family. And the people that were living around
her started calling me in Iglulik. Because it was an
emergency, “there is an ambulance and things outside your
daughter’s house.” Those two people didn’t want to tell me
their names. They were her neighbours.

When they told me that, I tried to call to
her house -- there’s her picture behind you. She went to
the safe shelter for two months, at Apex -- but she went
back to where she would get killed.

Thank you. However, I tried calling a few
times and nobody would answer at her home. I checked her
Facebook page. It said “Rest in Peace,” and I was all
alone. I couldn’t even cry. That is her real father, Apitai Inok (phon). When she was 18 months old, we split up, and he got another wife, Meka Hamanuk (phon). The RCMP in Iqaluit, Meka and Micah are almost the same; Meka, they thought it was me. They informed the people in Pond Inlet at first. And the RCMP didn’t even let us know when I was living in Iglulik.

And other people in Pond Inlet, when they heard, my family -- we were going to have a reunion. It seemed like it was all set up already. They were all at home because we were going to have a reunion. I was called on the phone by my family from Joshua and Uppa (phon) in Pond Inlet. They prayed for me. I started to cry. I was able to cry at the time, I think over two hours.

Going back and forth to the phone, I would go to the washroom, I didn’t know what to do. What should I do, what should I do? Because it was so surprising. When I heard, the RCMP, I called them in Iglulik; and they didn’t even inform the RCMP in Iglulik. They had to go check it out, find out what happened, whether it’s true or not. So they started giggling.

When they went to get the information the next day, they came to my house. They came to apologize to me. They said they made a mistake and they didn’t let me know, inform me as a mother. That is something that was
very painful at the time because of that.

A lot of people in Iglulik have supported me. I used to work at the Hamlet. They were able to buy our airfare from Iglulik to Pond Inlet, all the family members. I am very thankful to them. And the Elders there and my friends in Iglulik would come and visit as Inuit do. I am very thankful. They used to tell me, "You’re going to be able to smile one of these days.” I couldn’t believe them. I had thought that I would have no more happiness in my life. That has to change.

In the North, the RCMP, let them not be the ones to communicate to Inuit. They don’t know Inuit culture. The police need a communication person or let the Hamlet be the ones to let the family know.

I have to agree to have a communications person. Even if it’s a white person, as long as they can speak the language, it would be all right, as long as they’re the ones to let the family know. Over the last two years, they have to move to a different community and they don’t speak the language. And who the family members are, they don’t know the connections.

This is the problem. Many, many years we have seen this. We need to address the situation.

I was told by Elders, I am very thankful to them -- they said I would be able to smile again. It
seems, because they went through it. And I’m going through it now. And they said, I’m going to be able to rise, whether it’s from someone close by or far away, they can help me rise myself. I’ve heard of people going through similar situations where their siblings or children got murdered. I believe it. And I found out that I’m not alone, I’m not the only one going through this. There’s a lot of other people that are going through the same thing.

We were not supposed to see, but the father and myself, we were given -- we were told to give a blood sample. And when we went to Pond Inlet, the RCMP laughed at me. I didn’t want to be alone when they were taking blood from me. “You can’t give a little bit of blood when you’re alone?”

My older sister, Uppa, I asked her to accompany me. Afterwards it was funny, because when we got there I told her to hurry. I went to go get her by truck. We went there when she wasn’t quite dressed properly. She just had pyjamas on. She laughed at herself, because when we’re going through hard times, as Inuit, sometimes we just want to laugh. She’s like that.

I know it’s the angels’ way of helping. You can feel it when you’re being prayed for. They prayed for us family members in Nunavut, because she was here. She grew up here in Rankin. Went to school here. A lot of
people in Rankin know her. A lot of classmates know Nicky. They were very good friends.

I know a lot of people talked to me about the stories they had about how welcoming she was as a midwife and all the ones that she helped come into this world. I don’t have any more comments, I’ll just leave it at that.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: When we spoke earlier, we had a question about the notification process that was in place. Could you clarify a little bit more about that?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: I was saying the names of Meka and Micah are almost identical, so there was a confusion as to which was Meka and which was Micah. So there was confusion in the notification processes that were in place at the time. And so, of course, she’s my daughter.

My relatives did not feel it was in their interest to speak on my behalf as the mother of the child, and they did not want to be interviewed by the media with their questions. At first I wasn’t interested in being interviewed myself, but one of the questions was, became this: “Are the Arreak’s supportive of murder, then? Because you won’t reply?”

That was one of the questions I was given.
And I was also told that if I didn’t give any interviews, I was actually in support of the abuse and the murder and the circumstances that occurred to women. This was one issue I’ve had with the media and their probing on something so painful. It is said there are five steps that are taken as a person goes through a grieving process. The shock of it was part of my experience.

I later on, as a result, did do an interview with the media. And I asked of the media to please respect the Inuit culture, whereby you give the person grieving who experienced the loss, three days prior to contact for interviews or to answer questions. There are many other instances that I can give that affect Inuit women, but I’m not going to talk about them right now.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN:
Thank you, Micah. I will then ask Qajaq Robinson to continue.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
(Speaking in Inuktitut). Do you wish to speak of your grandchildren, too?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: Yes. When we lose someone we love, our memory is affected, but it is getting better as I overcome the grief and leave a little bit of it behind me, my memory seems to improve.

Little Alexandra had the age of seven; this
is her picture. We heard she had no head. It was removed.

My only thought of comfort was, I hoped they didn’t get
hurt or feel the pain. I did not want to think of the
trauma and the pain they went through. Those painful,
above all else.

It was reported as being the case, her
partner or her child was trying to protect her mother from
the abuse and the violence. And as a result, she died. We
have a name of a child with a defective heart that is named
after her. And we did that for her birthday, it occurs on
Valentine’s Day.

And so, it’s very hard to forget. I am
getting better, but the memories come and the memories go.
Even the food that she was fond of reminds me. They bring
the memories back for a while. Yes.

But as I said earlier, there are five steps
in the grieving process. Some of us tend to cry and not
deal very well with it. Some of us become stoic and we
cannot grieve or cry. There are those differences
sometimes that human beings go through. And some of it
will result in longer healing processes that are required
if we don’t cry. If we can cry, but on the other hand,
remember too that if you can’t cry, you can’t force
yourself to cry.

When my father died, I couldn’t cry. I was
the only one there to help with the medical services. It was a long time later on that I was able to cry over the death of my father.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

I have a question. You just indicated that Sula had been at the women’s shelter. Could you elaborate a little more on the circumstances of the time?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: It was during the springtime that she had moved to the women’s shelter for two months. She had tried to return the day before. But we don’t really understand what the difficulty was. It could have been that she was living in Iqaluit rather than in Apex, the location of the women’s shelter. And I lived in Iglulik at the time this occurred. We also got a lot of support from our family and friends in Iqaluit.

But as this developed, I want to thank the people that have been supportive of me through my hardship. Our experience has been such that has been experienced by other people before us. So the Elders and the people who supported us, spoke from their own experiences, and that gave it a lot of strength for us.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

During the springtime when she went to the women’s shelter, was it based on her relationship with the father of her
children?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: Prior to having lived with my daughter, he had a previous relationship, whereby he would also beat his woman. But I didn’t think that this would occur with our daughter, because we have different relationships. And it turned out the man had a history of beating up his woman before he met Sula.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
Was he ever accused legally?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: No, he never went to court, he was never charged. My daughter had to go to the women’s shelter for protection. Before her murder.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
You say she tried to go to the women’s shelter the day before?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: I believe she went June 4th or 5th, she tried to get to the women’s shelter, but it was full. So she was asked to try to find some family members in Iqaluit. It seems that out-of-town clients that had been referred to the women’s shelter were given priority. But she was a community person.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
So your daughter and your grandchildren were murdered.
After that, did you receive support from, for instance, Family Services or Social Services, or the RCMP?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK:** We got support from the local Inuit more than anyone, including municipal services. Two people helped me who were from Mental Health Services. They didn’t quite know how to approach me and to aid me. But they did give me support in what I might need and what I might require.

You have very limited services of this sort in Nunavut, and they don’t speak any Inuktitut. We are starting to see more of these services being made available in Nunavut, but at that time, no, not very often.

**INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:**
You just indicated your experience with the media. You spoke once about speaking to a manager. I just wanted some clarification on what happened with who.

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK:** My older sisters actually do work at CBC Radio. Many of my friends and colleagues work with the media. And I indicated that there has to be some kind of policy to try and be more respectful of the Inuit way of grieving, where you give them some space when they need it, when they’re hurting and they’re in pain.

I suggested, you need to be given three days of space to yourself to mourn and to deal with the shock of
your child’s murder. That was my recommendation to them. The murder of my daughter was immediately broadcasted over the radio and the news sources. And that causes a lot of pain, when you find out about the death of your own child via media.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ

ROBINSON: You referenced your sister as well. Can I ask you about Deborah, Deborah Evaluarjuk? So, Deborah died in Ottawa?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: Yes, that was the information we were given. We don’t have -- when a person has a condition, it could be whether a person has a heart condition or hearing aid, or are diabetic or have seizures. And apparently she died of a seizure. We had never seen her actually ever use breathing apparatuses or the puffers for the condition of being prone to seizures. So I don’t know. She was adopted from another family. And her children, her three children live in Ottawa. Two are adopted by people in Iglulik, so she had five children. Together they came to these agreements.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

Do you know if an autopsy was carried out?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: That is something I still don’t know. However, I heard that she had a seizure while she was taking a shower. And so she
fell, and so she lost her senses and she stopped breathing. It was also relayed to us that she had vomited in the toilet, in the bathroom, earlier. But where this was confirmable, we never did get to the sources. And we had no one to contact to ask those types of questions.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
I’m hoping to understand. Am I allowed to talk about Reepa? Was there an autopsy carried out by the RCMP?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: No, there was no further investigation. It was simply stated that she committed suicide. I tried to push for an autopsy. Her father disagreed, so therefore the possibility was immediately shut down. They did have cameras, too, at the Frobisher Inn. And I asked if I could see the tape from the cameras. Apparently they keep records for 48 hours before they use the same video. I was never given the opportunity.

She’s buried in Kuugjuaq -- Churchill. Her properties were also sent away. I could not enter her residence after that. I couldn’t go. My brother paid for her ticket to Kuugjuaq, so she’s buried in Kuugjuaq.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
How old was she?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: I think she was born in 1969, on November the 19th, that was her
birthday. And she died in 2006 or 2007, yes.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
I have no more questions. What about you?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: No,
I don’t. However, do you have any further additions you
would like to add to the recommendations you have
suggested?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: Yes, I
would want to see my recommendations put into place,
especially as it regards the right to privacy upon
experiencing a murder in one’s family. It should also be
that the family is not forced to have to pay for the return
of the body. We need to have some kind of support system
there. I would also like this person to speak, if that’s
okay with you.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. JEANNE ARREAK-
QULLUALIK: As Nunavut beneficiaries and Indigenous people
in Canada, people who lost their children or their family
members to murder should not be forced to have their bodies
returned and pay for the cargo or the cost. We did try to
raise the funds, but because of the person’s popularity,
the aunts, the relatives, the uncles, entire households of
family members came for the memorial. But it took a very
long time.

Of course, looking back, in a murder
situation being called a suicide, it took us a long time for the coroner and the RCMP to release the body after their autopsy and investigation. And the people are suffering throughout all this. And it’s deferred and it’s delayed and it’s deferred again and again. It became springtime when we were getting too much attention.

My relative in front of me had no grieving process. So we went away so we could do our due process of healing and grieving, out on the land, without shame, in private. We brought our children and we stayed together to grieve for six weeks.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. MICAH ARREAK: And it was only when the coroner released the body after an autopsy that, six weeks later, it took that long before we could get the body back, six weeks later. A lot of the samples had to be sent down to Toronto so that they could be investigated further. And so the waiting period was six weeks. And according to our Inuit culture, one must return the body as soon as possible.

Then we put the body into the burial grounds. As soon as possible, not six weeks later, like we had to. Many people I see are waiting for a month to over a month, to get the autopsies and the bodies returned for burial. I don’t know, is that fair? Do we have to wait that long? Inuit culture is such that you must bury a body
upon its death.

We have a lot to be grateful for now. We maybe need to hold a plebiscite as to who would support these ideas. So that we determine Inuit, traditional Inuit and kondunat (phon). It’s not something that I’ve considered very much actually myself, but it’s just something that was given as a thought.

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. JEANNIE ARREAK-QULLUALIK:** The people in Iqaluit kind of had a rough idea about when to expect the body, or news about the body. There was no one in particular who was acting as a spokesperson. We knew that person, but we wanted the confirmation we never received. So you are left wondering. Some of the relatives, the uncles, the aunts, would seek confirmation. But they couldn’t get any kind of information until many days later, because finally their identification was confirmed.

When you live in an Inuit community, you know the person is gone. But without the confirmation of the ID of the person who died, it causes a lot of -- I don’t want to say exhaustion, but...

**MS. JEANNIE ARREAK-QULLUALIK:** ...they can have the cultural compassion to say, I don’t know what more evidence you want; but I can tell you, we were just waiting for the confirmation of their identification. That’s all
the family needed to hear. Because the family is scattered everywhere...

INTERPRETER FOR MS. JEANNIE ARREAK-

QULLUALIK: ...Pond Inlet, Clyde River, Iglulik, Iqaluit, Kuugjuaq, Ottawa; everywhere, lived the relatives. I just wanted to elaborate on that a little bit more.

INTERPRETER FOR MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN:

Thank you to both of you, Micah and Jeannie. I don’t have any more questions. If you don’t have any more questions, Qajaq, we could finish the session. Are we done?

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

I just want to say thank you. I feel weak now. Thank you, we are done.

Thank you, Micah and Jeannie. We want to bestow our gifts to you for your testimony.

MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: Thank you. We are done today.

--- Exhibits (code: P01P11P0103)

Exhibit 1: Folder containing 12 digital images displayed during the public testimony of Micah Arreak and Jeannie Arreak-Qullualik.

--- Upon adjourning at 16:20
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Shirley Chang, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Shirley Chang
May 7, 2018