

Inuit languages get boost

Languages Commissioner gets right to investigate; Microsoft develops Inuktitut interface

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Nunavut's Languages Commissioner Alexina Kublu has been on the job six months but she's already seen plenty of change.

In June, the Senate endorsed Nunavut's new Official Languages Act, slimming the territory's number of official languages to four from eight.

Now, an extended mandate under the Inuit Languages

Protection Act has given Kublu the power to better enforce the act and initiate investigations.

"I think, as with all acts, the more enforceable they are, the more useful they are," said Kublu. "Some acts are created and although they read very well, there's sometimes nothing in the act that has an enforcement component to it."

Kublu added the new act makes it easier for her, and the Languages Commissioners who will follow her, to say, "OK, the act says this is what I can do." "It says that I can initiate investigations – that I'm not just sitting here waiting for someone to raise a concern," she said.

The new mandate also allows the commissioner to apply to the Court of Justice if she or he can't solve the matter by mediation. The ability to initiate legal action is two-fold. "Nunavummiut can take legal action if they feel the languages commissioner is not dealing with the matter," said Kublu.

Tools for preservation

The extended mandate is not the only thing to change under Kublu's post. In addition to added power, Kublu also has some new tools for Inuit language preservation in Nunavut.

"It's one thing to say, 'Well the Inuit language has to be used.' (But) how can it be used?" said Kublu. According to her, a big step in boosting Inuktitut use will come with the release of Microsoft's new interface packs, which were developed in partnership with Iqaluit based company Piruvik and allow users to switch between English and Inuktitut.

"We are very few people. You look at the number of Chinese in the world, and the number of people who use English, or even Cyrillic and the Islamic writing – there are very few people who use syllabics," said Kublu. "And yet, when you put it on that scale, for them (Microsoft) to have taken the interest and the time to work with us was huge," she added.

With all the new developments, Kublu will have her work cut out for her over the next few years. "Just going forward is a very large goal at the moment. We have been handed a great big stepping stone. It's now up to us (to figure out) how do we climb up to the first step ... (and) so, OK, now we've climbed the first step, how do we go to the next step?" she said.

In the meantime, Kublu said she hopes she is still around many steps from now. "I want to be around in 10 years time. We're celebrating

Nunavut at 10 now ... I would like to be around to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, to see where things are at in 10 years time," she said.