

A focus on Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland): Geopolitical Anxiety, Indigenous Rights, and the Global Mandate of Social Work

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The vast majority of the Kalaallit (Greenlandic) people live informed, reflective lives. They follow the news closely, discuss global events with family and friends, and maintain a healthy, critical perspective on the information circulating on social media. Yet the geopolitical tension of recent years has created a new layer of anxiety. One that reaches far beyond politics and into the everyday lives of ordinary people.

When [Donald Trump's son visited Nuuk in January 2025](#), his first public act was to appear at the statue of the country's coloniser, Hans Egede. Shortly afterwards, he encouraged a group of people to wear "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) baseball caps. The imagery carried significant symbolic weight and prompted widespread discussion across the country. Many Kalaallit people experienced the moment as a reminder of Greenland's long history of external interest in its land and resources.



Figure 1: Statue of Hans Egede located in Nuuk's Colonial Harbour. Photo taken by Dan Allen

For social workers in Kalaallit Nunaat, these geopolitical tensions are not abstract. They emerge in conversations with children, families, and individuals navigating vulnerability. Through [action research](#) and voluntary practice in a [local soup kitchen in Nuuk](#), we have witnessed how global political narratives can surface as anxiety, confusion, and fear among ordinary citizens.

One elderly woman who regularly visits the soup kitchen asked quietly:

"Why is that orange man calling it an annexation of Greenland? It sounds like a nice word, annexation. But then I looked it up and it means invasion, taking over territory by force. That really worries me. So, it isn't a nice word at all."

As she spoke, her words stood out as a clear illustration of how geopolitical tensions are not being confined to policy arenas. They are filtering into community spaces, shaping perceptions of safety, belonging, and future stability. This is, at its core, why we do what we do as social workers. We listen. We receive people's frustrations. We sit with their fears.

In the soup kitchen, people often talk about poverty, loneliness, or inadequate municipal case management. Now, however, the frustrated conversations stem from something much larger, the sense that nationhood, culture, and everyday life is under threat. Geopolitics is disrupting the peace of and lives of the Kalaallit

people who have no stake in [rare earth minerals, oil, uranium, or foreign power struggles](#), yet once again find their Indigenous homeland the object of external claims of ownership and violence.

We must understand, therefore that these pressures are compounding the existing risks faced by children, young people, and adults living with loneliness, mental health difficulties, homelessness, domestic violence, abuse, and poverty. Now that geopolitical instability has entered the lives of the people of Kalaallit Nunaat, these vulnerabilities have been made far worse.

Despite feeling powerless to stand against foreign military powers, we must remember that our duties as social workers endure. We need to be present, we need to listen attentively, we need to be kind, we need to respond when asked and we need to share in the worry being expressed in homes and communities. Allowing ourselves to show vulnerability, even as professionals, is not a weakness - it is part of ethical practice.

Social Work Within a Changing Global Context



Figure 2: Mural of a Woman and Polar Bear in Nuuk. Photo taken by Dan Allen

Like the Kalaallit people, social workers are not immune to political and economic forces. Rather, we practice at the intersection of geopolitical tension and lived experience. [The International Federation of Social Workers' definition](#) of our profession underscores this responsibility, emphasising our collective duty to promote human rights and social justice by engaging with the structural conditions affecting the individuals, families, and communities we support.

As events in Kalaallit Nunaat continue to unfold, we call upon the international community of social workers to recognise their role in supporting all people. At a time when geopolitical pressures generate uncertainty and vulnerability, we believe that acts of solidarity are not symbolic gestures, they are essential.

So what can we do to help?

We all carry a moral and ethical responsibility to stand with communities whose rights and freedoms are threatened and to amplify their voices in global conversations. [Research undertaken in Kalaallit Nunaat](#) consistently highlights the importance of focusing on children and adolescents, who are often the most affected by instability and social challenges. International collaboration can strengthen these local initiatives, ensuring that young people and families have access to resources, support networks, and recognition of their rights.

Equally important is raising awareness of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). As a united profession, we must recognise that any change in sovereignty without free, prior, and informed consent constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights. Our role includes helping communities and policymakers understand this principle while advocating solidarity, reconciliation and restoration rather than exploitation.

World Social Work Day: A Call to Global Solidarity

As [World Social Work Day](#) approaches on 17 March, we are offered a moment for reflection and renewal. The theme for this year, *'Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society'*, highlights the vital role of social work in bringing people together across communities, cultures, and systems to shape a more inclusive and sustainable tomorrow. It must be known that in Kalaallit Nunaat, decisions made in distant centres of power reverberate through local communities, shaping wellbeing, opportunity, and hope.

Solidarity must extend beyond borders, encouraging practitioners everywhere to recognise their interconnected responsibilities. When we advocate for human rights in one region, we reinforce the ethical foundations of our profession worldwide.

In uncertain times, we must be steadfast in our commitment to promote social cohesion, defend dignity, and support communities as they navigate complexity. By strengthening international partnerships and maintaining a rights-based focus, we need social workers everywhere to help transform vulnerability into resilience.

Solidarity is not optional - it is our vocation. As we approach [World Social Work Day](#), and live with the uncomfortable geopolitical tensions being experienced in Kalaallit Nunaat, let us reaffirm our shared commitment. Let us listen carefully, let us act ethically, and let us stand alongside the Kalaallit people, ensuring that even amid geopolitical change, the principles of social justice, human rights and kindness remain to guide us through these strange and turbulent times.



Figure 3: Graffiti illustrating the impact of social development in Nuuk. Photo taken by Dan Allen