



December 6, 2011

## **Inuit Call on Global Leaders at CoP 17: Binding Agreement Urgently Needed to Ensure the Future of our Arctic Homeland**

The Inuit Circumpolar Council supports the Arctic Council statement to UNFCCC CoP 17 that states: "Combating climate change is an urgent common challenge for the international community and requires immediate global action." We concur with the Arctic Council that ambitious mitigation commitments from all countries are urgently needed as a basis for a new global agreement that will limit the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels. In particular, we call on leaders from developed nations not to abandon commitments made under the Kyoto Protocol, but rather to enhance and strengthen previous commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions."

*The Inuit Circumpolar Council urges global leaders to support Inuit in sustaining our ice-dependent lands and livelihoods by taking the following actions:*

1. **Recognize the role of the Arctic in sustaining global climate systems and supporting life on earth.** Global leaders should designate avoidance of further climate change impacts on the Arctic as one of the key benchmarks for effectiveness of a Post-2012 process.
2. **Support the integration of Inuit and indigenous knowledge and local monitoring into regional and global environmental assessment processes by:**
  - a. *Integrating traditional knowledge into IPCC reports and encouraging Inuit experts to serve as authors.*
  - b. *Supporting community-based monitoring of environmental change and developing global databases to integrate local observations and monitoring systems into regional and global scale models.*
3. **Support Inuit and indigenous peoples with adaption and sustainable technology development by:**
  - a. *Creating a Green Technology Fund that will allow developed (Annex I) countries to allocate a percentage of their contributions for indigenous peoples from their own regions.*
  - b. *Assisting Arctic, indigenous, and remote communities in developing renewable energy options that will increase their economic viability and decrease dependence on energy imports and outside resources.*
4. **Recognize the fundamental human right of Inuit to a healthy environment, and respect Inuit sovereignty and the rights of indigenous peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as custodians of their homelands.** We call on the international community to recognize the human rights implications of climate change for Inuit and indigenous peoples, and to respect Inuit sovereignty over all decision-making processes in the Arctic.
5. **Acknowledge the important role of the Arctic Council as a model for cooperation between states and indigenous peoples, and encourage states to develop similar forums for addressing environmental challenges in their own regions.** The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls on global leaders to develop collaborative decision-making forums that include indigenous peoples as formal participants through which to tackle the issues raised by global environmental change and intersecting, trans-boundary environmental issues.

### **The Inuit Circumpolar Council and Climate Change:**

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an indigenous peoples' organization, founded in 1980 to promote and celebrate the unity of 160,000 Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia. ICC works to protect and promote Inuit rights, the Inuit way of life, and to safeguard the Arctic environment. As the international voice of Inuit, ICC is calling upon global leaders at the December UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (CoP 17) to listen to this Inuit voice.

The health and well-being of Inuit are inextricably tied to the Arctic environment. For millennia, we have been stewards of the Arctic, and our culture and subsistence traditions reflect our deep knowledge and respect for the land. Climate change is already impacting Inuit livelihoods, as melting sea ice and less predictable weather make it harder to utilize traditional knowledge. Increasingly uncertain weather and unstable sea ice have made it harder and riskier for us to travel and hunt on the land, infringing on our human right to a healthy environment.

Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia are deeply concerned about current and potential impacts of climate change on our health, the health of our homeland, and the wellbeing of future generations. Inuit and scientific knowledge suggests that we have reached a critical point in terms of Arctic change; sea ice and glacier melt is quickening, and scientists predict an ice-free September by mid-century. The future health and wellness of our families and communities depends on our ability to maintain our land-based livelihoods and pass on our cultural knowledge to the next generation. The global community must do everything possible to prevent further climate impacts on the Arctic. The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls on global leaders to adopt a binding emissions reduction treaty in Durban, and to increase emission pledges to keep global temperature rise well below 2 °C to protect the fundamental human right of Inuit to a healthy environment in which we can continue to practice our ice and snow dependent way of life.

*In addition, Inuit urge global leaders to support us in sustaining our ice-dependent lands and livelihoods by taking the following actions:*

**CoP 17 Action Point #1: Recognize the role of the Arctic in sustaining global climate systems and supporting life on earth.**

**Arctic ecosystems play a crucial role in supporting life on earth, and should be recognized as a benchmark for the effectiveness of a post-2012 global agreement.**

Arctic glaciers store vast quantities of fresh water, and run-off from glaciers and ice sheets has contributed 40% (1.3 mm) of the total sea level rise (3.3 mm) observed annually between 2003 – 2008.<sup>1</sup> Scientists predict temperature increases in the Arctic of 4 – 11 °C by the end of the century, and an ice-free September in the Arctic Ocean by mid-century. While we don't know the exact amount of sea level rise that we can expect, current predictions suggest that oceans may rise as much as 1.6 meters above 1990 level by 2100; if emission levels are unchecked, the level may be even higher. Arctic ice is poised to make up a significant part of these higher sea levels, which could lead to the displacement of millions of people living in low-lying deltas, coastal areas, and islands.

Additionally, huge quantities of freshwater runoff from Arctic ice has entered the Arctic Ocean in recent years. As this freshwater moves out of the Arctic, there is a risk that it may alter large-scale ocean currents that help regulate climate globally (SWIPA 2011).

The Arctic is home to many unique species of plants, microorganisms, fish, and mammals, and is an important breeding ground for migratory mammals and birds. Changes to ecosystems thus raise concerns for global biodiversity.

Global leaders should designate avoidance of further climate change impacts on the Arctic as one of the key benchmarks for effectiveness of a Post-2012 process.

**CoP 17 Action Point #2: Support the integration of Inuit and indigenous knowledge and local monitoring into regional and global environmental assessment processes.**

**Inuit knowledge is an important source of information and wisdom about observed environmental change in Arctic ecosystems, ice dynamics, and weather processes.**

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Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program. 2011. "Snow, Water, Ice, and Permafrost in the Arctic: Executive Summary."

The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls for the integration of Inuit and indigenous knowledge and local monitoring into regional and global environmental assessment processes through the following efforts:

- a. *Integrate traditional knowledge into IPCC reports and encourage Inuit experts to serve as authors.*

Inuit Traditional Knowledge has provided a wealth of information for researchers and policymakers seeking to understand the rapid pace of Arctic climate change, and its impact on ecosystems and communities. Inuit contributed Traditional Knowledge as part of the expert knowledge incorporated into the Arctic Council's *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, a state-of-the-art report when it was published in 2005, and a model for integrating "two ways of knowing." Inuit knowledge played a key role in many community-led and collaborative projects and initiatives that were part of the global *International Polar Year* research initiative, documenting environmental change in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia. The Inuit Circumpolar Council contributed to a study on the *Circumpolar Flaw Lead System* in the Beaufort Sea, documenting the knowledge of Inuit communities who have occupied and used this area for thousands of years. Community-led and collaborative research has yielded many insights and details about change that complement scientific approaches, and have proven a valuable and reliable source of information for policy makers.

Because of its effectiveness in complementing scientific observations, Inuit Knowledge should be incorporated into – and made a focus of -- future assessments by the IPCC.

- b. *Support community-based monitoring of environmental change and develop global databases to integrate local observations and monitoring systems into regional and global scale models.*

The Arctic Council's *Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks* (SAON) initiative is one example of an effort to integrate community-monitoring initiatives into a wider data and information system focusing on Arctic environmental change. SAON's goal is to provide free, open, and timely access to high-quality data through a network of international organizations, agencies, and northern residents involved in research and operational and local observing. Another initiative, *Exchange for Local Observations and Knowledge of the Arctic*<sup>2</sup> (ELOKA), based at the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado-Boulder, facilitates the collection, preservation, exchange, and use of local observations and knowledge of the Arctic. ELOKA provides data management services and support to Arctic communities and others who are working with local and traditional knowledge, and fosters collaboration between resident Arctic experts and visiting researchers. It also models a way for climate data to be made free and publicly accessible to those most likely to be affected by climate change, such as Inuit in remote, Arctic communities, as well as decision-makers responsible for sub-national, national, regional, and global policy development.

These initiatives support community members in their efforts to document and monitor environmental changes that impact their lives. They enhance the efforts of scientists to collect accurate, ongoing data about local environmental change impacts by connecting them to community-level resources and information. Together, Arctic residents and researchers are making significant contributions to understanding the Arctic and recent changes.

Global leaders and decision-makers should support regional efforts like SAON and ELOKA to integrate community-based monitoring into larger networks for sharing and scaling knowledge about environmental change, and to make climate data free and publicly accessible.

**CoP 17 Action Point #3: Support Inuit and indigenous peoples with adaption and sustainable technology development.**

**While Inuit are resilient and are pursuing local adaptation initiatives, the costs of major infrastructural issues stemming from climate change will require outside assistance. Sustainable technology development can support Inuit communities in becoming less dependent on outside resources.**

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More information on SAON is available at [www.arcticobserving.org](http://www.arcticobserving.org) and on ELOKA at [www.eloka-arctic.org](http://www.eloka-arctic.org).

Inuit have long been admired for our ability to live in harsh climatic conditions and to adapt our subsistence practices to cultural and environmental change. For thousands of years, we have thrived in our Arctic homeland, drawing on our Traditional Knowledge for subsistence hunting, and to maintain our cultural and spiritual connection with the land, ice, and animals. Inuit have already begun to develop local adaptations to the changes we are experiencing, including investing in community freezers to make food storage and sharing easier, and developing new training programs on emergency preparedness and sea ice safety, among other innovations.

Although Inuit are resilient and adaptive, the scale of changes in the Arctic will require significant investment in new and updated infrastructure, as well as investment in land skills and practices. These adaptations are significantly beyond the reach of Inuit communities, and will require global and national level leadership and commitment of resources. As the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program recently stated: “Everyone who lives, works or does business in the Arctic will need to adapt to changes in the cryosphere. Adaptation also requires leadership from governments and international bodies, and increased investment in infrastructure.”<sup>3</sup>

The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls on global leaders to take the following steps to support Inuit adaptation and resilience in the context of a changing environment:

*a. Create a Green Technology Fund that will allow developed (Annex I) countries to allocate a percentage of their contributions for indigenous peoples from their own regions.*

Wealthy nations have a moral responsibility to assist *all* vulnerable peoples in adapting to climate change. As such, any adaptation framework adopted by the global community should recognize the responsibility of wealthy countries towards communities within their borders that are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, including indigenous peoples. The adaptation framework should allow Annex I countries to designate a certain percentage of funding for green technology to be made available to indigenous peoples from their own regions.

*b. Assist Arctic, indigenous, and remote communities in developing renewable energy options that will increase their economic viability and decrease dependence on energy imports and outside resources.*

Inuit, Arctic, and indigenous and remote communities stand to benefit tremendously from small-scale, renewable energy projects. Indigenous Arctic communities are heavily dependent on outside resources, leading to a significantly higher cost of living in the Arctic than in communities further south. Although Inuit communities contribute relatively little to global GHG emissions because of our small numbers, many communities are currently dependent on diesel as a major energy source. We would like to do our part to decrease emissions by making our houses more energy efficient, and by collaborating on renewable energy initiatives that would decrease our dependence on outside resources.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council welcomes collaborators interested in developing renewable energy technologies appropriate for northern latitudes and remote community use.

**CoP17 Action Point #4: Recognize the fundamental human right of Inuit to a healthy environment, and respect Inuit sovereignty and the rights of indigenous peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as custodians of their homelands.**

**Respecting Inuit human rights and sovereignty requires involving Inuit in all aspects of decision-making associated with the environmental, political, and economic consequences of environmental change in the Arctic.**

Inuit have lived in intimate association with the Arctic environment for millennia, developing sophisticated environmental adaptations that have enabled us to thrive in an environment of ice and snow.

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Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program. 2011. “Snow, Water, Ice, and Permafrost in the Arctic: Executive Summary” p. 12.

The Arctic environment is more than just a provider of subsistence resources; it is also our homeland, the land where we developed our culture and traditions as Inuit people. Climate change threatens our ability to practice our subsistence traditions, and also our ongoing relationship with the Arctic environment, which is changing more rapidly due to anthropogenic climate change than it has for thousands of years. As the *Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights* submitted by former Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, states succinctly: “The culture, economy and identity of the Inuit as an indigenous people depend upon the ice and snow.”

Watt-Cloutier’s petition documented several significant ways in which climate changes poses threats to Inuit and violates our human rights, including the right to enjoy and use our traditional lands, the right to enjoy our personal property, the right to health and life, the right to residence and movement, and the right to our own means of subsistence.<sup>4</sup>

Recent resolutions by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights underscore the ways in which climate change is directly and indirectly violating human rights, particularly for indigenous peoples, resource-dependent communities, and groups already struggling with poverty and other forms of inequality<sup>5</sup>. These resolutions underscore the importance of a human rights approach to climate change in international and national decision-making contexts, and emphasize the fundamental importance of effective participation of communities in decision-making processes.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council has issued two declarations that outline Inuit rights and responsibilities in relation to decision-making in an Arctic context. *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* also provides relevant guidance for states and decision-makers on the need for full participation in climate change decision-making:

- a. *The Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*<sup>6</sup> details the rights of Inuit to be involved in all decision-making and governance processes that will impact Arctic lands and waters, which are their traditional homelands. This includes international negotiations related to Arctic shipping, environmental protection, resource development, and regional and global climate change monitoring and governance mechanisms.
- b. *The Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development* details the rights of Inuit to be involved in all aspects of decision-making regarding resource development in Arctic lands and waters. As the Arctic is increasingly accessible to developers due to melting snow and ice, respecting Inuit sovereignty and right to participate in decisions about resource development will be critically important.
- c. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) should form a baseline for all state and international level negotiations and framework development on climate change, with particular attention to the rights of indigenous peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) regarding the implementation of new protocols in their traditional lands and territories.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls on the international community to recognize the human rights implications of climate change for Inuit and indigenous peoples, and to respect Inuit sovereignty over all decision-making processes in the Arctic, and the rights of indigenous peoples to FPIC as custodians of their homelands.

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See Watt-Cloutier, Sheila et al. 2005. *Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States*.

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See UNHRC Resolution 10/4, “Human Rights and Climate Change,” adopted 25 March 2009, and IACHR press release no. 28/11, “IACHR Concludes its 141<sup>st</sup> Regular Session,” issued April 2011.

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*The Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic* and the *Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development* can be downloaded from our website: [www.inuitcircumpolar.com](http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com).

**CoP17 Action Point #5: Acknowledge the important role of the Arctic Council as a model for cooperation between states and indigenous peoples, and encourage states to develop similar forums for addressing environmental challenges in their own regions.**

**The Arctic Council's governance structure includes Arctic states as well as indigenous peoples, and is designed to offer an inclusive and transparent process for regional decision-making.**

The Arctic Council, comprised of Arctic nation states along with six Permanent Participants representing Arctic indigenous peoples, including the Inuit Circumpolar Council, is a forum for decision-making based on transparency, access, and collaboration. Member states and Permanent Participants collaborate to address specific issues of shared concern through working groups, meeting frequently to increase shared knowledge on contaminants, environmental monitoring, conservation and environmental protection, emergency preparedness, and sustainable development. For Inuit and other indigenous peoples, having a formal mechanism through which to participate in regional decision-making is critically important. Transparency of information and participation in decision-making on issues that impact local communities is also a right guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council calls on global leaders to develop collaborative decision-making forums that include indigenous peoples as formal participants through which to tackle the issues raised by global environmental change and intersecting, trans-boundary environmental issues.



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