



Inuit Call to Global Leaders: Act Now on Climate Change in the Arctic

-- November 13, 2009 --

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an indigenous peoples' organization, founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 160,000 Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia. As the international voice of Inuit, ICC is calling upon global leaders at the December UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (CoP 15) to listen to this Inuit voice. ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life.

ICC is deeply concerned about the current and potential impacts of climate change on the cultural, spiritual, and economic health of Inuit throughout the Arctic. We are concerned about the health of the Arctic environment, which not only sustains us, but also plays a vital role in keeping the earth's systems healthy as a whole.

Inuit call on global leaders at COP15 to:

1. Help Inuit sustain their lands and territories by *Ratifying* a Post-2012 agreement that will stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations at 350 parts per million by volume, in order to ensure that long-term temperature increases remain well below 2°C.
2. Recognize the impact of climate change on Inuit by *Designating* avoidance of climate change impacts on the Arctic as one of the key benchmarks for effectiveness of a Post-2012 process.
3. Welcome direct Inuit input by *Calling* upon the IPCC to develop a future assessment on climate change and Indigenous Peoples utilizing and addressing the important role of traditional knowledge in informing policy decisions.
4. Work with Inuit in their efforts to adapt to the new Arctic by *Creating* an International Climate Change Adaptation Fund financed by G20 countries to help citizens of the planet adapt to the inevitable changes and to accelerate technology transfer. An immediate investment of \$20 billion (USD) is needed, increased to \$100 billion (USD) annually by 2020.
5. Recognize the vulnerability of Inuit and other indigenous peoples by *Adopting* a mechanism for adaptation assistance to vulnerable groups, communities, and countries that:
 - a. Provides financial support and technical assistance to communities, such as Inuit, that are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts;
 - b. Devolves funding and decision-making to the lowest possible level (i.e. communities instead of states) and incorporates the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent as adopted by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
 - c. Makes available adaptation assistance to vulnerable communities and populations living within developed nations (Annex 1 countries).
6. Support Inuit in benefitting from and participating in appropriate technology development by *Incorporating* assistance for appropriate, small-scale, green energy technology as part of adaptation and mitigation financing in support of healthy, local economies.

In 2008, ICC convened an International Polar Year climate change policy workshop aboard the vessel CCGS *Amundsen*, which brought together climate change scientists and Inuit leaders to address the effects of climate

change in the Arctic region. Based on insights from these leaders, we released the “Amundsen Statement: 2012 Climate Change Roadmap” (available at www.inuitcircumpolar.com), which highlighted our strategy for addressing the global threat of climate change.

Building on the Amundsen Statement 2012, the following “Call to Global Leaders” provides updates to scientific and Traditional Knowledge on climate change. Our engagement on climate change is based on our Inuit Traditional Knowledge, which offers detailed and valuable insights into a changing world, and on our role as custodians for the land where we have lived for thousands of years.

ICC’s COP15 Platform:

COP15 Action Point #1:

Ratify a Post-2012 agreement that will stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations at 350 parts per million by volume, in order to ensure that long-term temperature increases remain well below 2°C.

We need a post-2012 agreement, ratified by *all* the world’s leaders, that will stabilize GHG concentrations at 350 parts per million to avoid catastrophic change in Arctic systems.

Inuit and scientists agree: human-induced climate change has already caused changes in physical, biological, and social systems in the Arctic. The Arctic has warmed at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the world over the past century, and scientists predict that warming trends in the Arctic will continue to outpace other regions. An increase in average global temperatures of 2°C, currently identified as a “point of no return” for climate change impacts, would mean an increase of 3.2 to 6.6°C in the Arctic – an increase that would have major impacts on sea ice and glaciers. For every 1°C in temperature rise, sea ice decreases by approximately 1,480,000 square kilometers, an area roughly equal to the land masses of Sweden, Norway, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom combined.

The *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment* (2005) reported that large areas of the Arctic basin would be ice free in the summer months within a decade, and the IPCC’s *Fourth Assessment Report* (2007) concurred that impacts on ice, snow, and glaciers would be significant. Updates to these reports suggest that changes are occurring faster than anticipated: in 2007, Arctic sea ice reached a record low, and in 2008, both the northeast and northwest passages were ice free for the first time in recorded history. Scientists now suggest that the Arctic will be ice free in the summer in 20 years, with most of the melt occurring in the next decade.

Although scientists have predicted changes to Arctic systems for decades, the pace of change over the past several years has surprised many. It is clear that we must do everything in our power to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C to protect the viability of Arctic sea ice, ecosystems, and cultural traditions.

COP15 Action Point #2:

Designate avoidance of climate change impacts on the Arctic as one of the key benchmarks for effectiveness of a post-2012 process.

The Arctic’s physical and metaphoric importance in regulating earth systems and illustrating the impact of climate change should be reflected in the next global agreement on climate change.

The Arctic environment plays a unique role in global climatic and oceanic systems. Arctic ice and snow help to keep the earth cool by reflecting sunlight back into space. As sea ice and multiyear ice and snow melt, the darker ocean and earth below will absorb heat, thus amplifying the rate of climate change. Melting water from glaciers will lead to sea level rise, and may also impact ocean circulation, which impacts temperature and rainfall patterns around

the world. A recent report by the United States Climate Science Program based on paleoclimate data suggested that sustained warming of even a few degrees (in the range of 2°C - 7°C) would be sufficient to cause the eventual disappearance of the Greenland ice sheet, which would raise sea level by several meters.

The information provided by scientists studying climate change has thus helped us to understand the essential interconnection of our planetary systems. The Arctic plays a uniquely important role in helping to support the ecological adaptations on which our global human civilization depends. The Arctic has played another essential role in helping the human community come to terms with climate change: impacts of climate change on Arctic ecosystems and human communities have helped illustrate the significant dangers posed by climate change. Images of impacts on Inuit and other Arctic indigenous peoples have been striking, and have helped capture the world's attention, putting the "human face" on climate change. From the community of Shishmaref, Alaska, forced to relocate due to climate change, to the community of Tuktoyaktuk in the western Canadian Arctic, where the government is experimenting with wind power, to Inuit elders in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka struggling to find new, safe routes in sea ice and weather that is less predictable than in the past, voices from the Arctic have become part of the moral and ethical foundation demanding strong leadership on climate policy.

Because of the Arctic's unique physical and metaphoric importance in climate change, ICC calls on world leaders to designate avoidance of climate change impacts on the Arctic as one of the key benchmarks for effectiveness of a post-2012 process.

COP15 Action Point #3:

ICC calls upon the IPCC to develop a future assessment on climate change and Indigenous Peoples and the important role of Traditional Knowledge in informing policy decisions.

Inuit Traditional Knowledge has provided critical information about climate change impacts in Arctic ecosystems, complementing scientific knowledge. Traditional Knowledge should be incorporated into – and made a focus of -- future assessments by the IPCC.

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."

Documenting Inuit Traditional Knowledge about environmental change was also a major emphasis of several research projects funded through the International Polar Year (IPY). The *International Polar Year - Circumpolar Flaw Lead System Study* is undertaking an intensive scientific study of the unique flaw lead system located in the Beaufort Sea. The flaw system is comprised of areas of open water surrounded by ice. These open water areas foster significant biological productivity, making them natural laboratories for studying the changing polar marine ecosystem.

As a major partner in the three-year *Circumpolar Flaw Lead System Study*, the Inuit Circumpolar Council is undertaking a comprehensive traditional knowledge study of the Inuit communities who have occupied and used this area of the Arctic for thousands of years. The integration of these "Two Ways of Knowing" will help determine the long-term implications to the Arctic and the global climate system of the current impacts due to the changing climate.

The incorporation of Inuit knowledge as a major component of these research programs demonstrates that the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples holds great value for understanding climate change and its impacts worldwide. As such, ICC calls upon the IPCC to develop a future assessment on climate change and Indigenous Peoples and the important role of traditional knowledge in informing policy decisions.

COP15 Action Point #4:

Create an International Climate Change Adaptation Fund financed by G20 countries to help citizens of the planet adapt to the inevitable changes and to accelerate technology transfer. An immediate investment of \$20 billion (USD) is needed, increased to \$100 billion (USD) annually by 2020.

Immediate financial assistance is needed to assist communities already significantly affected by climate change with adaptation planning and implementation.

It is clear that world leaders must adopt a strong post-2012 agreement that ensures that all countries participate in mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit global temperature rise. This is vital to the health of our planet and our communities. But even if a strong post-2012 plan for mitigation is adopted, communities in the Arctic and around the world are already struggling to address challenges created by climate change in their communities. Scientists tell us that because of complex feedback systems in our global environment, temperatures will continue to rise in coming decades even if we limit our emissions today. Because of this, global leaders must commit significant funding to support those most affected by climate change, and this funding must be *in addition to* funding committed to assist with development goals. Furthermore, mechanisms for delivering this funding need to be carefully thought out to ensure both equity and accountability (see #5, below).

COP15 Action Point #5:

Adopt a mechanism for adaptation assistance to vulnerable groups, communities, and countries that:

- a. Ensures the availability of financial support and technical assistance to communities that are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts;
- b. Devolves funding and decision-making to the lowest possible level (i.e. communities instead of states) and incorporates the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent as adopted by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- c. Ensures that vulnerable communities and populations living within developed nations have access to adaptation assistance.

Because Inuit communities in the Arctic, alongside other indigenous communities, are among those most affected by climate change, adaptation mechanisms must be directed not only towards developing countries but also vulnerable populations within developed states.

Inuit have long been admired for our ability to live in harsh climatic conditions. As Inuit, we thrive in our Arctic homeland, drawing on a vast repertoire of Traditional Knowledge practices that we continue to utilize for subsistence hunting today. However, changes in governance structures have made some traditional adaptive practices unfeasible today. Traditionally, Inuit migrated seasonally according to availability of animals. The governments of Arctic nations encouraged Inuit to settle in permanent settlements to make provision of services easier and to incorporate Inuit more clearly into national governance. As such, some traditional adaptive practices, such as moving to a new settlement, are currently unfeasible without significant assistance.

Although some adaptive measures (for example, sharing information about safe hunting routes) are very low-cost and are already being practiced in many Inuit communities, others will be more expensive. For example, many communities currently face problems with erosion and slumping due to permafrost melt; these problems create adaptation challenges such as the need to drill deeper and deeper pilings, and the relocation of individual buildings or entire communities. Such adaptations are significantly beyond the reach of Inuit communities without outside assistance.

Although wealthy nations have a moral responsibility to assist vulnerable countries with adaptation efforts, they also have an obligation to ensure that vulnerable communities *within their own borders* have the resources, knowledge, and technology needed to adapt. 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.

COP15 Action Point #6:

Incorporate support for appropriate, small-scale, green energy technology as part of adaptation and mitigation financing in support of healthy, local economies.

Fostering resilience and the capacity to adapt means fostering healthy, sustainable, self-governing communities.

Numerous studies have shown that the best way to ensure that communities can adapt to change is to support resilience, health, and economic well-being at the household and community levels. Alongside other peoples that continue to practice subsistence traditions, Inuit struggle with issues of food security, a lack of jobs, housing shortages, and many chronic health issues. In addition, the cost of living in Arctic communities is among the highest in the world.

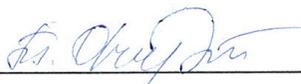
It makes sense in this context to provide adaptation and mitigation assistance that will help to foster resilience, independence, and health at the community and household level. Support for appropriate, small-scale energy technology is one mechanism for fostering economic well-being and decreased energy costs for communities and households. ICC recommends incorporating support for small-scale, green energy technology as part of adaptation assistance. This assistance should be available not only to communities in developing countries, but also to Inuit, other Arctic indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable populations living in wealthy nations.

Inuit Circumpolar Council's International Engagement on Climate Change

ICC recognizes the ongoing need for Inuit to engage with the circumpolar and international processes including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Arctic Council and international science bodies (i.e. IASC, IASSA) to ensure the Inuit knowledge and perspective is considered and reflected in these processes. ICC is working to ensure that the ultimate text of the Post-2012 process recognizes the unique issues faced by Inuit in adapting to climate change.


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