



INUIT

Press Release

Inuit in Solidarity with Indigenous Amazonians as Thousands of Forest Fires Blaze Worsening International Climate Crisis

August 27, 2019 – As thousands of hectares of tropical forest burn from wildfires in South America, Inuit across circumpolar nations in Alaska, Canada, Chukotka, and Greenland are expressing their solidarity with the Indigenous peoples living in the Amazon and their concern for the implications of these fires on the global climate system.

The 7.4-million square kilometer Amazon basin is home to one million Indigenous peoples, and about three million species of plants and animals. This region is critical to regulating climate change, as the forests absorb millions of tons of carbon emissions each year. During forest fires, the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere, and the rainforest's ability to absorb carbon is diminished.

While these fires burn south of the equator, their impacts are not sequestered by borders. The massive impact on the planet's carbon balance will have consequences for regions far from the Amazon, including the Arctic. With rates of temperature increase over twice the global average, Inuit Nunaat (Inuit homelands) is already experiencing "catastrophic climate change". ICC Canada President Monica Eil-Kanayuk commented that, "Transformation of the Arctic landscape, and of Inuit lives and livelihoods that are intricately tied to this landscape, will only be accelerated and further devastated by the raging forest fires in the Amazon that are raising global temperatures and fueling further melting of sea ice and glaciers. What happens in one part of the planet has impact on us all."

ICC Chair Dalee Sambo Dorough said, "We're very concerned about the reports we are hearing from Indigenous leaders in Brazil regarding the government of Jair Bolsonaro. It's unconscionable to hear that his government has unleashed an assault on Indigenous peoples by turning a blind eye, allowing farmers, ranchers, and miners to exploit deep into the Amazon rainforest – their homelands. Many are uncontacted tribes that have no firefighters, no means to put out these devastating fires."

Official figures indicate more than 77,000 forest fires were recorded in Brazil in the first eight months of 2019, almost double the 40,000 fires in the same period last year. Amazonas, the largest state in Brazil, has declared a state of emergency. Venezuela, Bolivia, Columbia, and Peru also report thousands of forest fires.

The fires have been releasing a large amount of carbon dioxide, the equivalent to 228 megatons so far this year, the highest level since 2010.

"We take note of international protests against the Brazilian government, such as protests held outside Brazilian embassies around the world on Friday August 23rd, and online petitions urging the Brazilian government to investigate deforestation," said Dalee Sambo Dorough. "Countries which tout the importance of Indigenous rights have an obligation to press Brazil to change its current path. We applaud the French government for putting it on the agenda of the G7 Summit in Biarritz, and calling it an international crisis. G7 Leaders announced \$20-million US to fight the fires, with France sending military assistance. Canada will send an additional \$15-million CDN, and water bombers."

The ICC Chair also commended actions such as online petitions, notably urging the European Union and the United Nations to put sanctions in place forcing the Brazilian government to address the problems related to deforestation.

“We believe that other countries, including Canada, can also play a strong role,” said ICC Canada President Monica Eil-Kanayuk. “Canada has a duty to speak out not only at the G7 Summit, but also directly through diplomatic channels with Brazil, and at the United Nations. With the United Nations Climate Action Summit now less than a month away and the annual UN Climate Change conference set for December, there is no better time, indeed no more urgent time, to raise ambition and increase climate action internationally. We recognize our critical part as Inuit, alongside our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and we call on governments to support Indigenous Peoples and to respond as an emergency like this requires.”

A report card from the Climate Action Network released last week shows that many of the G7 countries' current policies are not sufficient to cap global temperature rise to 1.5 C, as outlined in the Paris Agreement, but rather are on track to see temperature increases exceeding 4 C compared to pre-industrial levels.

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The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous Peoples' Organization (IPO), founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 160,000 Inuit from Alaska (USA), Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. In regard to climate change, we believe that it is crucial for world leaders and governments to recognize, respect and fully implement the human rights of Inuit and all other Indigenous peoples across the globe.