



Press Release

Inuit at COP25 – Our Ice is Melting, Our Oceans are at Risk, Our Planet is on Fire

December 13, 2019 – Madrid, Spain – Inuit leaders emerge from the UNFCCC COP25 Climate Change conference underlining that greater actions and measures are needed by governments, corporations, and civil society to meaningfully address climate change.

ICC Chair Dalee Sambo Dorough, ICC Canada Vice-President Lisa Koperqualuk, and National Inuit Youth Council (NIYC) President Crystal Martin-Lapenskie each brought distinct messages to this meeting -- rooted in Inuit knowledge and linked to scientific facts -- supporting their messages that greater action is needed to deal with the climate emergency.

COP25 was designed to take the next crucial steps in the UN climate change process. A key objective was to complete several matters with respect to putting the Paris Climate Change Agreement into action, including development of rules for carbon markets.

However, this conference is seen by many to have moved too slowly on implementing what is known as the Paris “rule book” – the steps needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the agreement. Many observers have pointed to last month’s UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap Report, which showed that global greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 1.5% every year during the last decade. The report stated that if this rate continues, global average temperatures are likely to increase by 3.2°C this century. This is way above the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C and will have disastrous consequences for the world and in particular the polar regions.

Inuit have worked with agencies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to get the message out that the concrete action is needed now. “We contributed to the recent Special Report on Oceans and the Cryosphere,” said ICC Chair Dalee Sambo Dorough. “We brought informed commentary to this meeting, invoking the accelerated pace of climate change ravaging the Arctic regions of this planet – our home. We have echoed the conclusions of the IPCC’s reports in the past two weeks, collectively. Our ice is melting, our oceans are at risk, and our planet is on fire.”

Sambo Dorough pointed out that International Human Rights Day took place on December 10th during the two-week COP25 meeting.

“As this crisis evolves it is our future generations who have the most at stake, and it was rightfully pointed out that it is also becoming a human rights issue for our children and youth,” she said. “They have a right to a future.”

For the President of the NIYC Crystal Martin-Lapenskie, attending COP25 was an opportunity to bring concrete proof from Inuit Nunaat – the Inuit homeland – that climate change is transforming the environment Inuit use all year round to live on and to hunt. “Inuit youth brought a documentary film to COP25 called *Happening to Us* filmed in Tuktoyaktuk, Canada, showing the extent of shoreline erosion caused by rising sea levels, and aerial views of melting permafrost. It couldn’t be more graphic,” said Martin-Lapenskie.

“Youth are demanding that we act,” said ICC Greenland President Hjalmar Dahl. “Our Inuit youth brought graphic images of our communities falling into the ocean showing us that we must all take more drastic actions to combat climate change. We have less than 10 years to keep our planet under 1.5°C temperature increases and every year is critical.”

ICC Chukotka President Liubov Taian stated that, “We belong to a region where rapid and significant climate changes are noticeably occurring, causing widespread melting of sea ice, permafrost, and reduction of snow cover. And, the negative impact of climate change is having serious impacts upon human health. There will be no health if the links between Inuit life-health-family are torn apart.”

The critical issue of increased ocean acidification was addressed by ICC Canada Vice-President (International) Lisa Koperqualuk during the conference. At an Arctic Council event called *Tackling Polar Ocean Acidification* Koperqualuk stated that, “We have been made aware of Arctic ocean acidity levels increasing at twice the rate compared to the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. More carbon dioxide in the waters puts marine life and the food chain that we depend on – and are part of - at risk. Our Arctic waters are also being damaged by climate change and the impacts are the most felt in our homeland. We must continue our work advocating for protection of our environment, our culture, and our lives.

“What needs to happen is that countries need to raise ambition and show spirit of cooperation in moving the negotiations and thus implementation of rule book forward,” Koperqualuk said.

The next UNFCCC COP26 climate change conference will take place in Glasgow, Scotland in December 2020. Over the next year ICC will continue to advocate for stronger climate action and will push the governments of Arctic nations to increase their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while at the same time tackling the urgent need for adaptation in places like Tuktoyaktuk and other Inuit coastal communities.

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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 180,000 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.