

Glasgow, November 1-12, 2021

Inuit call for the tools needed to protect the Arctic

Inuit Circumpolar Council UNFCCC COP 26 Position Paper

**Make space for Inuit in climate governance
to protect the Arctic and protect the planet.**

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous peoples' organization, founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 180,000 Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. As the international voice of Inuit, ICC is calling upon global leaders at the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland to listen, support, and act upon climate issues identified by Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples.

Inuit call on global leaders at UNFCCC's COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland to:

- 1. Make unprecedented and massive efforts to cap global temperature rise.**
- 2. Value Indigenous Knowledge and leadership on climate action and support Indigenous participation in climate governance.**
- 3. Recognize the oceans and cryosphere as critical ecosystems that must be protected through partnership with Inuit.**

Inuit are facing an existential threat and are experiencing a violation of our fundamental human right to a safe and healthy environment. For over 30 years, Inuit have witnessed an Arctic environment eroded by climate change. Our communities and our culture cannot function or thrive as they once did. We hold an intimate knowledge and

connection with the land, waters, and sea ice developed over thousands of years of Inuit use and occupancy of the Arctic coast and marine regions. As Inuit Nunaat (our homeland) transforms before us, we have painstakingly documented the changes we see in our Arctic homes - changes in weather and ice patterns, changes in distribution and abundance of wildlife, new species, stressed infrastructure, and the cultural and social impacts of these changes.

In 2009 at COP15, Inuit advocate Sheila Watt-Cloutier spoke of the Arctic as a barometer for the rest of the world. At that time, the Arctic was already in a dire state and her words were words of warning. But they were also words of guidance: if we protect the Arctic, we protect the planet. For decades now, the barometer readings have been alarming. Inuit have devoted much time, energy, and resources to alerting the world to the reality of climate change and the need for international action to halt the pace and scale of change before the rest of the planet begins to feel impacts as the Arctic has felt and continues to feel.

There is no doubt that Inuit knowledge and advocacy have strengthened the resolve of the international community to make serious efforts to restrict the emissions of greenhouse gases. However, resolve is not action and the Arctic as we have known it for thousands of years is slipping away as permafrost thaws and sea ice melts. Our home is becoming unrecognizable. The icepack is melting. We have been calling for the adaptation and mitigation strategies necessary for our survival and the integrity of our communities, from relocation to infrastructure to protection in place.

Living with climate change has been our reality for many years. The rest of the world is now experiencing what it means to live with climate change. In 2021, people were hit by floods in Europe and Asia, fires in Canada, Russia, and the United States, and droughts in Brazil and Madagascar. This year's report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was unequivocal: climate change is real; it is happening now and has already locked in irreversible changes. It is up to us to decide how much worse it will get.

Inuit take no satisfaction that we were among the first to sound the alarm bell as we observed our homelands beginning to change. We recognize that our existential threat and the violation of our rights are shared by many others. That is why we continue to show up, to advocate alongside our Indigenous colleagues and friends, and to continue sounding alarm bells and calling for action.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council requests global leaders to support Inuit leadership on climate change by taking the following actions:

Make urgent and unprecedented emissions reductions

The Arctic Council's *Arctic Climate Change Update 2021* concludes that the Arctic is warming three times faster than the global average and that warming will have a major effect on ice, land, and seas. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the coming years can limit the extent of Arctic climate change, especially after mid-century, but the Arctic of the future will certainly be very different regardless of the emissions scenario.

International and national commitments are not quick enough or strong enough to keep the combined average temperature of global land and ocean surfaces to below a 1.5°C increase above pre-industrial levels. While governments are distracted by questions around the equity of emissions, we cannot help but note the irony of our position as a people whose emissions are negligible in the grand scheme of things being subjected to temperature increases that are three times the global average. We encourage state parties to the UNFCCC not to lose sight of the imperative to urgently drive down greenhouse gas emissions.

- 1. We call on the eight Arctic Council states and the nations with Observer status at the Council to genuinely act on their special responsibility to reduce emissions. These countries represent a large proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions. In the most recent Arctic Council Ministerial Declaration the Arctic states underlined the need for enhanced action to meet the Paris Agreement's temperature goal. We look for those words to be converted into actions at this COP.*
- 2. Contribute to a fund that Indigenous Peoples may access and recognize that the needs of Inuit communities are similar to climate vulnerable communities in non-G20 countries with emerging economies.*
- 3. Invest in Inuit-driven renewable energy development in Arctic communities using options that will increase local economic viability and decrease dependence on energy imports and outside resources.*

Support Inuit participation in international forums and processes related to the oceans and Inuit marine habitats

While mitigation remains a priority, we are also asking the international community to take actions necessary to address the inequity of climate impacts on Inuit by giving us the latitude we require to adapt to the present and coming realities of our Arctic homes.

The international community must respect Inuit sovereignty and our inherent right to self-determination over all decision-making processes in the Arctic as well as over our knowledge. For many generations Inuit have sustainably managed the marine resources

throughout our homelands. Our ability to continue to successfully manage these habitats is now challenged by global changes and processes. This means Inuit need a direct voice in controlling processes that go beyond our lands and waters. Specifically, we need states' support for effective, equitable, and meaningful Inuit participation in international forums and processes that directly affect the future health and viability of our waters.

1. *Include Inuit in the discussions on Arctic shipping at the International Maritime Organization.*
2. *Enable Inuit and Indigenous engagement in the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.*
3. *Incorporate Inuit input and knowledge into discussion on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.*
4. *Implement the commitments in the Central Arctic Ocean Treaty to include Indigenous Knowledge in decision-making and give voice to Inuit.*

Recognize the value and necessity of Inuit leadership and Inuit knowledge in climate governance and climate assessments

We must see support for the equitable participation of Inuit in climate change-related processes and programs at local, national, regional and international levels. Significant leadership and action have already been demonstrated by Inuit. This must be recognized and supported with sustained resources. Through our direct participation, Indigenous Knowledge must be recognized, respected, and used in regional, national, and international climate research, knowledge synthesis, and policy development.

1. *Support community-based monitoring of environmental change and utilize Indigenous observations and monitoring systems in regional and global scale models.*
2. *Recognize and financially support, at the international and national level, Inuit defined and led adaptation and mitigation strategies to ensure that we can address present and future shortcomings as well as the gaps that exist within Inuit communities, including infrastructure, relocation, protection in place, and other climate related conditions.*
3. *Use Indigenous Knowledge in the IPCC assessment process and other major climate-related reports intended as an evidence base for climate policy, and support Inuit knowledge holders so that they may serve as substantive authors and contributors facilitated by an Indigenous Peoples' Expert and Knowledge Holder Advisory Body to the IPCC.*

4. *Ensure that the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement includes reports from community-based monitoring and information systems (CBMIS) as well as other data and observations produced by Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples. The Global Stocktake should also include a review of the integration of the principles and obligations of the Paris Agreement, including a specific focus on human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.*
5. *Provide sustainable funding for the full and effective participation of Inuit in regional and national climate action planning.*

Our requests go above and beyond the remit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Inuit, like many other Indigenous Peoples, view the world in a holistic fashion - we cannot break it down into issues of climate, ocean governance, human rights, or food security. For us, all of these issues are bound together, and we challenge the states that are parties to this convention, and to the many other relevant conventions at the United Nations, to view the world in the same way; to make the connections necessary between all of the different conventions to tackle issues holistically.

Inuit leaders, elders, knowledge holders and youth will be attending COP26 and as many other COPs and interim meetings as we can to continue to raise awareness of the situation in our homelands, the violation of our interrelated human rights, and the existential threat facing our communities and culture. The global community **MUST** act now to work with us in responding to this threat and do all that it can to curb climate change. We cannot wait any longer.

Dalee Sambo Dorrough, ICC Chair