



PRESS RELEASE

COP28 “Transitional But Not Transformative” We are at a Human Rights Tipping Point – ICC Chair

Dubai (12 Dec. 2023) – The 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change has concluded, and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) assesses the results as mixed. The ICC delegation, comprising Knowledge Holders, youth, staff, Chair Sara Olsvig, and Vice-Chair Lisa Koperqualuk, brought the Inuit voice to the climate talks.

“The good news is we have operationalized the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform after nearly five years of efforts by the world’s Indigenous Peoples,” said ICC Vice-Chair Lisa Koperqualuk. “The Platform is an achievement in itself, ensuring that Indigenous Knowledge holders are an integral to the process.” This year, ICC was able to bring two Knowledge holders’ voices to Dubai to participate in the Conference and the Platform’s Knowledge sharing activities.

ICC Chair Sara Olsvig highlighted the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and human rights in the text, along with the recognition of the Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge as significant achievements. She also noted some of the text that separates Indigenous Peoples from local communities, emphasizing that grouping them together has denied both the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples and the importance of the knowledge they bring in the search of solutions to the climate crisis.

One example of Inuit influence on the text is found in a paragraph that emphasizes ethical and equitable engagement with Indigenous Peoples and the application of the “knowledge, wisdom, and values of Indigenous Peoples” in implementing adaptation goals. As ICC Chair Olsvig emphasized, “It is vital that Indigenous Peoples are part of the discussions and are able to bring our solutions to the table. However, I would like to echo our sisters and brothers in the Small Island Developing States and agree that the results in Dubai are transitional but not transformative. We still have a long way to go — and we haven’t got a lot of time.”

The agreement comes as Inuit look out on open water in coastal communities across their homeland of Inuit Nunaat. Normally, sea ice begins to form in early November in many places, and by this time, it is safe to travel on. But this year, a combination of higher-than-normal fall temperatures, warmer water, and unusually strong winds have kept the ice away, affecting Inuit hunters’ ability to go out and harvest the nutritious country food. “Our reliance on the ocean’s resources,” said Olsvig, “shows the direct impact climate change poses to our food security, health, and culture.”

While the language is weak, this marks the first instance of a climate change agreement discussing “transitioning away” from fossil fuels. This proved to be a contentious issue as oil and gas-producing countries, along with the thousands of industry lobbyists who attended, worked hard to keep references to fossil fuels – whose burning is the primary cause of climate change – from the final text.

COP 28 was the first “global stocktake” where parties assessed progress since the goal of keeping the global average temperature increase under 1.5 degrees Celsius was set in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The text includes the very worrisome fact that 2023 is set to be the warmest year ever recorded, and the impacts from climate change are occurring even more swiftly than before. The text also emphasizes the need to take urgent action to keep the 1.5°C goal within reach and to address the climate crisis in this critical decade.

“Our homeland is warming at *four times* the rate of the rest of the planet,” Koperqualuk stated. “Our experience and observations, and all of the latest scientific analysis, tells us we cannot continue pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. A rapid phase-out is crucial if we are to meet the goal of the Paris Agreement.”

Among the other significant outcomes at COP28 was the operationalization of a Loss and Damage Fund, which was announced on the first day of the meeting. However, Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous Peoples are still not eligible for any of the funding mechanisms that were on the table in Dubai.

“ICC will continue to call for an end to the false dichotomy of developed and developing countries and lobby for support for Indigenous Peoples in the northern hemisphere, as well as all Indigenous Peoples, to have direct and equitable access to the funding mechanisms that are negotiated through the UNFCCC,” Olsvig said.

“We are not only at a climate change tipping point,” Olsvig added, “the lack of recognition of the severe impact of climate change on the rights of Indigenous Peoples means we are at a human rights tipping point as well. We need to be at the table in all negotiating processes, not just on climate change but in any other international processes that affect us.”

This was the largest climate change gathering in history, with nearly 100,000 people descending on the ultramodern Emirate of Dubai. Next year’s COP 29 will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan.

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