



INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE

ICC ADVOCATES FOR INUIT RIGHTS AND DISTINCT IDENTITY AT COP16 ON BIODIVERSITY IN CALI, COLOMBIA

October 24, 2024 – For the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16), taking place in Cali, Colombia this week, ICC’s focus will be on safeguarding Inuit rights and advocating for Indigenous Peoples to be referred to as a distinct group within international biodiversity frameworks.

As global discussions on biodiversity intensify, particularly in the face of escalating climate impacts, the ICC continues its mission to ensure the rights, cultures, and knowledge systems of Inuit are properly recognized and respected. ICC Chair, Sara Olsvig emphasized the organization’s commitment to preventing the erosion of Inuit rights within international negotiations, including those involving biodiversity.

“Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples play a significant role in safeguarding the planet’s biodiversity, regionally and globally” said ICC Chair Sara Olsvig, “At COP16, ICC will strongly advocate for the recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the fundamental instrument to ensure that Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples’ rights are fully and effectively implemented in shaping global biodiversity policies.”

Over the years, the ICC has raised concerns about the increasing trend among States and international organizations to group Indigenous Peoples with local communities in conventions and multi-lateral agreements. This grouping and conflation of terms has resulted in the slow and incremental erosion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and diminishes the effectiveness of Inuit advocacy and representation. This practice, as seen in prior environmental conventions like the 1992 Rio Declaration and the 2015 Paris Agreement, undermines the distinct cultural and legal rights of Indigenous Peoples, including Inuit, who have a unique relationship with the environment and biodiversity.

The ICC’s position is rooted in the principle that Indigenous Peoples are rights holders, not stakeholders or interest groups. The organization has consistently opposed the conflation of these terms and will continue to do so at COP16 and beyond.

In preparation for COP16, ICC has identified several key priorities:

1. **Recognition Indigenous Peoples:** ICC will call for the explicit recognition of Inuit as distinct Indigenous Peoples in all biodiversity discussions and agreements.
2. **UNDRIP as a Framework:** ICC continues to push for the adoption of UNDRIP as the overarching framework guiding all international agreements that impact Indigenous Peoples, including the **current 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.**
3. **Protection and respect of Indigenous Knowledge:** ICC will underscore the importance of safeguarding and including Indigenous Knowledge and its role in biodiversity conservation. This knowledge, passed down through generations, is vital to the sustainable management of the Arctic's ecosystems and must be included and respected in international biodiversity efforts.
4. **Climate Change and Biodiversity:** As the impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt in Inuit Nunaat, ICC will highlight the critical links between climate change and biodiversity loss, and the urgent need for international action that respects Inuit rights and Knowledge.

Although ICC will be participating remotely at CBD COP16 due to safety concerns, ICC will continue to press for the adoption of a distinctions-based approach to ensure that the unique rights, perspectives, and contributions of Indigenous Peoples are fully recognized.

“Inuit are stewards of the rich biological diversity across Inuit Nunaat and the lands, ice, waters that we call our home. Our knowledge and way of life are invaluable to the global fight to protect biodiversity. However, this can only be achieved if we are recognized as rights holders,” said Sara Olsvig.

ICC’s policy paper on the topic of terminology can be found here:

<https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-ICC-Policy-Paper-on-matter-of-local-communities-2.pdf>.

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ICC is an international Indigenous Peoples’ Organization, founded in 1977 to strengthen unity among Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. ICC promotes Inuit rights and interests at the international level, develops and encourages long term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment, and seeks full and effective participation and meaningful engagement in the political, economic, and social development of the Arctic region.

ICC holds Consultative Status II at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is a co-founder and Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council, an Observer at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and holds Provisional Consultative Status at the International Maritime Organization alongside other advisory and consultative roles across numerous international fora.

