

**Sixteenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
(24 April- 5 May 2017)**

**Agenda Item 4: Implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum with  
reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
26 April 2017**

**Indigenous Climate Action Intervention delivered by Heather Milton-Lightening**

Madame Chair, the Permanent Forum must take on a role in ensuring a space for Indigenous voices on climate change, and providing support for Indigenous rights based climate strategies while recognizing Indigenous Peoples as independent and sovereign agents of change.

We live in a time when **government rhetoric** describes a international commitment in the Paris Agreement to achieve the 1.5 degree climate threshold, recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples as described in the UN Declaration. And yet in the same moment, Madame Chair, **government action** mounts a direct assault on the rights of Indigenous peoples, our waterways and the safe-guarding of the ecosystems critical for climate stabilization and Indigenous cultural survival. Development of pipelines continues, traversing through and near countless Indigenous communities whose voices and rights have been systematically excluded from the process.

Extractives industries move forward in full force, and the processes in which they are reviewed and approved actively suppresses Indigenous voice, rights and the direct correlation between environmental preservation and Indigenous right to self-determination as described in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights describe the State Duty to Protect, the Corporate Duty to Respect and the Right to Access to Remedy. These pillars of protection, respect and justice **continue to elude Indigenous Peoples.**

Even in the face of minimum international standards like Free, Prior and Informed Consent as set out under the UN Declaration, Indigenous Peoples continue to be treated as expendable. It is obvious that there have been significant failings in the implementation of the UN Declaration. It is clear that real implementation **cannot occur in the absence of decolonization.**

We must not be forced to adopt state led prescriptions of "self-government" and "consultation." We must be able to realize the full meaning, content and function of Articles 3, 18, 19, 29 and 32. Furthermore, Madame Chair, **Indigenous Peoples must be the ones to describe the content of those rights. Not states.** We have to be able to exercise our own autonomy in addressing climate change through our own representative institutions, enabling us to address issues such as gender equity in decision-making [and the roles of Elders, youth, children and those in the broad gender spectrum].

Madame Chair, climate change must be understood as cross-cutting and manifesting in all six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum. In this regard, the Permanent Forum should consider climate change in the context of our Indigenous knowledge systems, our traditional medicines, our own languages and emphasize the inextricable connection of us, as Indigenous Peoples, to our lands and waters. While we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the UN Declaration, we must also note that it is almost ten years since the Permanent Forum addressed climate change as a theme the Seventh Session in 2008. There are approximately

66 past Permanent Forum recommendations on climate, and only 6 have been completed or implemented, while at least two have not yet been initiated.

Indigenous Climate Action therefore recommends that:

1. The Permanent Forum 17th Session be dedicated to addressing Climate Change as a **matter of urgency** with due consideration of **all mandated areas** of the Permanent Forum, and with follow-up on past PFII Recommendations;
2. The Permanent Forum hold a special half day session dedicated to the development of the UNFCCC Indigenous Knowledge Platform;
3. The Permanent Forum ensure the inclusion of climate change and its impacts in future reports, studies and publications - as a standing/cross-cutting issue in all mandated areas of the Permanent Forum;
4. The Permanent Forum engage in the development of the UNFCCC Indigenous Knowledge Platform and report on its participation at the 17th Session
5. The Permanent Forum conduct a study on the impacts of climate change upon Indigenous women for the 17th Session.

The protection and preservation of Indigenous rights and culture is undeniably a critical component of developing climate solutions that will help humanity achieve solutions to the climate crisis we are all locked in together. The full recognition and implementation of the rights of Indigenous peoples will be critical to us achieving true climate justice.

We can't ignore the fact that resources that are being extracted from waters, lands and territories of Indigenous peoples who have been forced into economic hostage scenarios - putting communities in positions that forces them to choose between fighting for their cultural survival or putting food on the table and a roof over their heads. Extractives industries continue to lead to the cumulative contamination and destruction of critical waterways, hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering and sacred sites of numerous Indigenous communities, while simultaneously being the largest single emitter of emissions. Many Indigenous communities within the extraction zones now have lower life expectancies, higher rates of cancer and auto-immune diseases and restricted access to traditional territories once guaranteed to them through treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements. No one should ever be forced to choose between simply feeding their children or protecting their overall health, their culture and language and their rights.