

Inauguration of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues



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Agenda item 6; Environment

Joint Statement from Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Saami Council

Good afternoon. My name is Sheila Watt-Cloutier, I am an Inuk from Arctic Canada and I am vice-president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, ^{for Canada} an organization representing Inuit in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia. It is my pleasure to speak to you today on behalf of ICC and the Saami Council. The Saami Council represents Saami peoples in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

I would like to preface my statements by saying that although my intervention is slotted under environment, it does touch upon the other topics listed to be discussed under health, culture, development and human rights. One cannot talk about the environment and indigenous peoples by compartmentalizing the issues of health, culture and sustainability as separate ~~issues~~ ^{from environment.}

Celebrating the inauguration of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is a happy time for us all. I would

personally like to thank the tireless efforts of all those who had the vision and made this Forum a reality. Working with many brothers and sisters from around the world this week, I feel blessed to be from such a diverse and unique peoples of global society.

Indigenous peoples everywhere face many challenges in finding their place in the new world order of globalization. A place that affords our peoples self-respect and security, and one in which we contribute to the well being of others. Our voices have not always been heard; our contribution and value not always recognized nor appreciated. We have had to fight hard to be heard. Many of us still struggle.

Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic have come far. Six Arctic Indigenous peoples organizations representing Inuit, Saami, Athabaskans, Gwich'in, Aleuts and Russian Indigenous peoples have "permanent participant" status in the eight-nation Arctic Council.

When indigenous peoples work in isolation, many challenges are insurmountable and many common goals unattainable. But through partnerships and accepting differentiated responsibilities I believe sustainable development is achievable at the local, regional and global scale. New and meaningful partnerships are at the heart of moving sustainable development forward in our homelands and elsewhere.

My region was virtually ignored in the debate leading up to and culminating at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Arctic is not

mentioned in Agenda 21. Yet, in the last 10 years Arctic issues have climbed up the political agenda, in part, as the South seeks our energy and mineral resources, contemplates Arctic shipping to link western Europe, eastern Asia, and North America, and as human health and environmental concerns such as persistent organic pollutants and climate change are framed in a global context. We welcome the attention to these issues of crucial importance to us in the Arctic as it allows us to ensure our traditional knowledge, perspectives, expectations, and recommendations on economic, cultural, social, and environmental issues are clear.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development is an important opportunity for us all. Inuit and all indigenous peoples have much to give the global community and also much to learn from experiences elsewhere.

The Canadian Government recognized the contribution Inuit could make to the WSSD process and has supported our active participation. Inuit have tried to single out areas of action on SD and areas where we can move the process even further.

We can show Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living together and working together through Home rule in Greenland, the Nunavut Territory in Canada, Sami Parliaments in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and borough governments in Alaska . Self-determination by northern Indigenous peoples is being achieved in the Arctic through land claim and self-government negotiations, although this is still a work in progress,

particularly in northern Russia. We must support indigenous land claim settlements throughout the world.

Indigenous peoples often experience environmental degradation first-hand as they remain close to the land. In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples occupy marginal land and often lack the resources to adapt or relocate when their land becomes contaminated and degraded.

The Arctic is becoming seen to be a barometer or indicator of the global effects of climate change, ozone depletion, and long-range transboundary contaminants. A wake up call for many.

We must not, however, portray the Arctic and its residents nor any indigenous peoples as powerless victims of global forces. Quite the contrary. We must show that we are resilient, in the case of the Arctic; we are a culturally diverse region, home to numerous Indigenous peoples, and an emerging geopolitical region of growing importance to the world. We adapted to monumental change in the past and we will again. However adaptation too has its limits.

Contaminants threaten our health and erode our way of life. Our cultural heritage, our soul and our physical well-being is dependent on the animals we hunt and eat. If we fear the contaminants in the very food that keeps us whole spiritually, culturally and physically we will not hunt. If we don't hunt, fish or herd our reindeers we will lose our culture and that which gives us the strength to negotiate these turbulent and precarious times.

Inuit along with Athabascans, Dene and Gwich'in in Canada participated throughout the negotiations for a global Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants or POPs. We put a human face on the issue – mindful always that our concerns in the Arctic were shared by peoples “mothers” around the world and in many cases their exposures were more acute. The process under the admirable leadership of Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program and the Chairman of the negotiations, John Buccini, welcomed our input. Our contribution was by no means token; we offered technical, political and moral support to the effort. We neither portrayed ourselves as victims, nor were we seen as victims -- but rather as players. As the Permanent Forum, this constitutes an example of how Indigenous Peoples and Government can work together for the benefit of all people. Let us continue to work toward ridding the world and our bodies of these chemicals.

Let us bring indigenous perspectives on global climate change to the forefront . All climate models predict a greater warming for the Arctic than for the rest of the globe with potentially severe impacts on its residents -- concerns shared by small island states which face annihilation as the sea and oceans rise. Again, indigenous peoples are on the front-line. Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It raises fundamental questions about the continuation of our cultures and ways of life. We must communicate this reality to governments and non-governmental organizations around the globe. We must show them that what they do affects us, and that what happens to us, in turn, affects

them. Hugh Brody, a well-known British anthropologist, is right when he says:

Without the hunter-gatherers, humanity is diminished and cursed; with them, we can achieve a more complete version of ourselves.

Finally, let us show the world how our renewable resource industries are sustainable – that big is not better and sustainable development starts in the communities. Indigenous peoples around the world depend on renewable resource industries, harvesting what the land provides has sustained our cultures for millennia and we are good stewards of these resources. In the Arctic, as elsewhere, uniformed public perceptions and attitudes and unfair trade restrictions impede our capacity to develop sustainable livelihoods in our communities – the sealing industry in the Arctic is but one example of this.

Therefore, the Permanent Forum's main focuses with regard to environmental issues should be to;

- Stop the removal of indigenous peoples from their traditional territories;
- Stop forest conversion, deforestation, degradation and desertification in indigenous territories;
- Introduce a moratorium on the expansion and exploration of mines and new sites of oil, natural gas and coal development in and near indigenous lands and waters if not acquiring the full and informed consent to such developments from the indigenous people concerned;

- Stop the destruction of indigenous waters, including the construction of large dams;
- Demilitarise and respect the integrity of indigenous territories;
- Promote the conservation, sustainable use and management of flora, fauna and biodiversity of indigenous peoples;
- Initiate training and capacity building programmes on indigenous peoples' rights and project management;
- Strengthen information dissemination, research, training and exchange programmes on biodiversity and cultural diversity as well as on indigenous economic and knowledge systems;
- Protect and strengthen the economical, environmental, political, social, cultural and intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples within the economic, trade and financial arenas;
- Take rigorous and immediate measures to reduce CO2 emissions at sites of origin;

In order to do so, one must;

- Recognize and respect the unique spiritual relationship between indigenous peoples' and their land, waters and natural resources, including genetic resources.
- Define and implement legal and political frameworks that guarantees indigenous peoples' collective right to their territories and resources and strengthen them as autonomous entities with specific competence in the economy, politics, social affairs, culture and management of territories and resources.
- Reform national social policies, land tenure regimes and administrative laws to recognize indigenous peoples' right to

- their land, water and self-determination.
- Establish models for environmental and sustainable development governance (such as the Arctic Council), which incorporates principles of genuine partnership between states and indigenous peoples, ecosystem approaches and collaboration between scientific and traditional knowledge.
 - Elaborate *sui generis* systems for the protection of indigenous biocultural heritage, collective genetic resources and traditional knowledge.
 - Develop mechanisms and procedures for the regulation of the private sector to uphold high standards of economic, environmental, social and cultural responsibility towards indigenous peoples.
 - Adopting policies and standards of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, consistent with existing and emerging standards on indigenous peoples' rights.
 - Establish a Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
 - Sign, ratify and implement the ILO Convention no 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal peoples in Independent Countries.
 - Adopt and implement the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
 - Ensure equal rights for indigenous women.
 - Recognize and respect indigenous processes and structures of governance and promote indigenous peoples' own policies, models and systems for protection of biological and genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

- Recognize indigenous peoples as equal partners in all decision-making affecting their lives, territories and resources.
- Respect the principles of effective participation and prior full and informed consent before embarking on any project or making any decision affecting indigenous peoples' lives, land or water.

We invite all the mentioned agencies to comment on the proposals made.

Let us use our new Forum and the WSSD process to sure that Indigenous peoples concerns from pole to pole, from the north pole to the tip of Tierra del Fuego, are included in the eventual outcomes endorsed by ministers in Johannesburg. Let us ensure the face of Johannesburg, the face of sustainable development for the next decade is an indigenous face.

Nakurmiik/Thank You