

Northern Voices In The Global Climate



Climate change is a serious issue for aboriginal peoples around the world. Too often, they are the first impacted because of where they live, and, they are impacted the hardest because of their reliance on harvesting game, fish, birds and plants.

Northerners have watched with increasing concern at the changes in their country and climate. The changes are happening faster and with greater impacts as our world struggles with this serious global issue.

In 2008, two aboriginal groups – the Arctic Athabaskan Council and the Gwich'in Council International – met with Ecology North, the Pembina Institute and the Climate Action Network Canada to address their concerns and to get their message across to the Government of Canada which is negotiating the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol. As the world meets in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009, the decisions made will impact our world for decades to come. The following pages outline our position and our concerns about the upcoming climate change negotiations.

The Road Beyond Kyoto

We recognize now that our climate is changing and in some regions, especially in the North, the effects of that change are more dramatic, more significant and more visible. The climatic changes are evident worldwide and this spurred a global reaction to do something. Beginning in 1979, when the first world conference on climate change was held, there has been a global initiative to bring together nations to address this growing problem. Two agencies of the United Nations began developing a protocol-- an agreement among nations-- to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that countries produce.

The United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change, which came into force in 1994, marked the first global agreement to attempt to cut greenhouse gas emissions. It recognized that the world's climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The countries which signed on to the Convention meet regularly to negotiate further amendments and actions to the levels of greenhouse gas emissions. One of the significant developments came in 1997 in Kyoto when countries agreed to a protocol which legally committed each country not to increase the amount of greenhouse gases they produce and to make efforts in actually decreasing these levels.

The international significance of the Kyoto Protocol is that it started a dialogue on strategic long-term cooperative action among the global partners. But Canada has lagged in meeting its commitments to the protocol.

In its continuing efforts to bring world-wide efforts to bear on this serious issue of climate change,



countries are now preparing for a new round of negotiations styled as "Kyoto II". These negotiations will wrap up in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark. The first phase of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012 and a new agreement must be in place to continue the work of reducing carbon emissions. The major burden for reductions falls on industrialized countries since these are also the major contributors to the increase in greenhouse gas emissions although all countries have a role to play in tackling global warming.

A key element of climate change efforts is to keep the global average temperature increase under a two degree Celsius limit relative to the pre-industrial level. If global temperatures increase more than this, scientists say, we then approach a tipping point where climate change accelerates and it would be impossible to undo the damage. We then risk major global warming and climate change. We are already beginning to see some effects of the current climate change - from disappearing sea ice in the Polar Regions, to disappearing permafrost in the Boreal areas, to eroding shorelines along low-

lying islands and seacoasts around the world.

When Canada sits down at the table in Copenhagen in 2009 to discuss and negotiate the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol, it will have the opportunity to show environmental stewardship and political leadership by promoting strong policies which will slow down the rate of climate change. And it's these changes which are significantly altering the face of the Arctic landscape to the detriment of the northern residents.

The Inuvik Declaration: Northern Voices in the Global Climate

In September 2008, five groups met in Inuvik, Northwest Territories to discuss common issues of concern about climate change. The indigenous groups involved – the Gwich'in Council International and the Arctic Athabaskan Council – had long expressed fears about the effects of climate change on their homelands. Their members had seen first-hand the effects of global warming on permafrost, the effects on wildlife and their habitat as new species shifted their ranges and resident species dwindled.

Gwich'in Council International and the Arctic Athabaskan Council had been discussing ways to work together with Ecology North, the Pembina Institute and the Climate Action Network Canada to bring these issues to the attention of the federal politicians and policy makers.

This resulted in the production of the Inuvik Declaration, a commitment among the five participants to work together to influence federal policy when the federal government negotiates the successor to the Kyoto Pro-

ocol in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009.

A major focus of these international talks will be to determine how and by how much greenhouse gases are to be reduced by 2020 in order to reduce the effects of global warming. Climate scientists describe global GHG emissions must peak between 2015 and 2020 in order to prevent passing the climate change tipping point of no return.

Indigenous groups world-wide have been lobbying their respective governments and the United Nations for a greater voice at climate change talks. Their position has been that too often it is indigenous people around the world who are impacted first and feel the effects most deeply from climate change because of where they live and how they live in connection with the land.

There are three major issues which should be tackled to reduce the effects of climate change. First, start with the right policies at home and commit to science-based targets for

the reduction of greenhouse gases and have a credible plan capable of reaching those targets.

Secondly, the Government of Canada must ensure the necessary resources are in place to help Canadians adapt to the coming changes and Canada must commit significant resources to the North to help northerners adapt to and reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

Thirdly, Canada should provide financial help to developing countries so they can reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adopt new, greener technologies.



The Inuvik Declaration

On Arctic Climate Change And Global Action: December 5, 2008.



Our Common Commitment:

We are united by our common commitment to a prosperous future for the Arctic and its peoples, and the urgent need for global action to prevent dangerous human-caused climate change. We recognize that the Arctic is a critical component of the global climate system, and that a changing Northern climate has worldwide implications. As such, we will work together to raise the profile of climate change impacts in the Arctic and to push for global action.

Humanity must come together to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas pollution and ensure that vulnerable communities and countries have the support they need to adapt and make a transition to a new energy economy. Industrialized countries like Canada must lead the way. We will work together to ensure that Canada rises to this challenge and does its fair share.

The Arctic Is Warming:

The Arctic is now warming rapidly with much larger changes projected. Climate change presents pressing problems for Arctic Indigenous peoples and residents, as well as risks to Arctic species and ecosystems.

Traditional knowledge complements science. Oral traditions present historic accounts of the local climate, plant and animal species, water regimes, and snow and ice conditions. Results from traditional knowledge and scientific research make us deeply concerned that:

- Arctic vegetation zones are shifting;

- Animal species' diversity, ranges, and distribution are changing;
- Coastal communities and facilities are facing increased exposure to storms;
- Thawing ground is disrupting transportation, buildings, and other infrastructure;
- Indigenous communities are facing major economic and cultural impacts; and
- The proposed increase in marine transportation and exploration threatens traditional whaling practices, marine species and waterfowl.

These changes create grave risks for all Arctic residents, and they represent an immediate threat to the safety and security of Northern Indigenous peoples. Changes in temperature and rainfall are already radically altering natural patterns, making many Indigenous peoples strangers in their own land and threatening their ability to live off the land as trappers, gatherers, fishermen and hunters. For many Northern Indigenous peoples, caribou is their life. It is their main source of food. It is their shelter and clothing. Today, there is growing uncertainty around the future of the traditional way of life.

Climate change is also making existing vulnerabilities worse by accelerating development and exploration that risks degrading traditional lands and waters, as well as compounding the problems associated with substandard housing, infrastructure and health systems in the North.



Change is being felt across Canada and around the world:

The Arctic is a barometer for global warming, and the scale of changes that Arctic people are experiencing today are beginning to be felt around the world. As climate change accelerates, Canada will face increasing risk of floods, heat waves, water scarcity, permafrost melt, rising sea levels and coastal erosion and flooding, vector-borne diseases, and a range of other impacts. Whatever benefits Canadian agriculture and forestry may experience, including longer growing seasons and warmer temperatures, will be negated by decreased soil moisture, increased insect infestations and more frequent forest fires, among others.

These changes will also be felt around the world, with often devastating impacts. The most impoverished communities and countries — those least responsible for creating the problem of climate change — will bear the heaviest burden if the world fails to act.

Humanity must limit the temperature increase:

If we act now, humanity has an opportunity to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. To do so, we must keep global average warming as far

below 2°C as possible, relative to pre-industrial temperatures. Rising global average temperature is a key yardstick of global warming, and is the basis for projecting other impacts expected from human interference in the climate system, including regional temperature increase and sea level rise.

Given that all regions of Canada are warming more than the global average, and the far North will be warming at 2–3 times the global average, Canada has perhaps even more reason than other countries to be concerned about the extent of global temperature increase.

Without concerted action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution, the global average temperature could exceed pre-industrial levels by as much as 4°C – 6°C by the end of this century. This would create an extremely high risk of catastrophic impacts in Canada and around the world. The changes in the Arctic would be even more severe than the global average.

Canada must do its fair share:

The changes that we are witnessing are a call to action, and we will work together to ensure that Arctic residents have the support that they need to adapt to those impacts that are already inevitable. We recognize, how-

ever, that the only viable, long-term response to climate change is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas pollution worldwide, primarily by reducing fossil fuel use. Northerners are willing to do their fair share, but this must be a truly global effort.

Global greenhouse gas pollution must peak and begin to decline within the next 10 years. In order for this to happen, Canada and other industrialized countries must commit to targets to reduce greenhouse gas pollution to at least 25% below the 1990 level by 2020 and at least 80% below the 1990 level in 2050. Scientific analysis shows that these levels are the minimum commitment required from industrialized nations if the world is to have a chance of avoiding dangerous climate change.

These targets reflect the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”, as recognized in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. This principle recognizes historical differences in the contributions of developed and developing states to the problem of climate change, as well as differences in their respective economic and technical capacity to tackle the problem. Canada has repeatedly endorsed this principle and acknowledged that as an advanced industrialized country with high per capita greenhouse gas emissions, it has a responsibility to show leadership in reducing greenhouse gas pollution. Unfortunately, Canada has also repeatedly failed to live up to its promise. We will work to ensure that Canada embraces its obligations and sets a good example for the world.

To play a responsible part in the global effort against climate change, Canada must start with the right policies at home. The first step is to commit to the science-based targets outlined above; this commitment must be accompanied by a credible plan capable of reaching those targets.

Second, Canada must ensure that the necessary resources are in place to

help Canadians adapt to those changes that are already inevitable. Northerners understand that even in the best emission reduction scenario, they will have to cope with climate change for at least the next 4 – 5 decades. Northerners have little choice but to adapt. In adapting however, Northerners will seek adaptations that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure environmental protection. The cost of adaptation will be high in social, cultural, and financial terms. The costs of adaptation in the North will likely be in the billions of dollars. Canada must commit significantly increased resources to Northerners to adapt and reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

Third, Canada must also pledge financial support to developing countries in their efforts to adopt clean technology and adapt to climate change. In particular, development initiatives should focus on the groups and regions hardest hit by climate change, including women, marginalized communities, and small island states.

A Responsible Role in the International Community:

The first phase of the United Nations Kyoto Protocol lasts from 2008 to 2012, and the international community is working towards adopting a new post-2012 global deal at UN climate negotiations in December 2009. We will work together to help bring about a strong and timely agreement.

At the UN negotiations in Bali in 2007, Canada found itself isolated for failing to recognize science-based emission reduction targets. Stronger policies at home, coupled with a willingness to play a leadership role internationally, are needed to make a positive contribution to the negotiation of a post-2012 global climate agreement in Copenhagen. Only a strong “Kyoto II”



that aligns with the science of climate change is capable of protecting Canada’s Arctic and its peoples.

Conclusion:

As the Arctic receives increased attention and its local, territorial, international, and global importance is better understood, Northern Indigenous peoples and Arctic governments have responded by undertaking research and developing policies aimed at assuring themselves a sustainable

future. An effective post-2012 climate agreement must protect Northern ways of life. We will work together in the coming months and years to make this a reality and ensure that Northern voices are heard at the international level.

Founding Organizations



Climate Action Network Canada is a coalition of more than 50 organizations from across Canada working together to prevent catastrophic climate change and promote sustainable and equitable solutions. We are the only network in Canada that brings labour, development, faith-based and aboriginal groups together with national and provincial environmental organizations in a united effort to fight global warming. The network is coordinated by a secretariat based in Ottawa.

For a list of member organizations see:
<http://www.climateactionnetwork.ca/e/about/members/organizations.html>

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Founded in 1971, Ecology North is a leading environmental organization based in Yellowknife and a member of Climate Action Network Canada.



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Ecology North has three main objectives:

- Promote public environmental education and awareness
- Promote sustainable living
- Reduce the impact of climate change

Its work has included:

- Working with Canadian Climate Impacts and Adaptation Research Network (C-CIARN)
- Participating in a number of workshops throughout the Northwest Territories on climate change adaptation, including co-hosting the 2007 Climate Change Leadership Summit.
- Working on a project to strengthen the NWT's overall response to climate change including the development of a carbon pollution tax.
- Working with the Dehcho First Nations and the Tlicho Government to start regional climate change planning.

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The Pembina Institute was founded in 1985 by a group of citizens concerned about the impact of oil and gas development in Drayton Valley, Alberta.

The Pembina Institute is a national, non-profit sustainable energy think-tank with a focus on the transition towards sustainable energy production and consumption, and its mission is to catalyze this transition. However, issues such as climate change, energy equity, energy security and economic/social development are global issues. Part of their strategy is to attempt to influence key international decisions, work in partnership with counterparts in other countries, and make sure that Canada plays its part in a global transition. The organization works through :

- Participating as active members of an Ottawa climate team that focuses on federal and international policy,
- Providing research for governments, communities, and companies on adaptation, and the implications of oil and gas development (including oil sands),
- Engaging in provincial climate-change initiatives.

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The Arctic Athabaskan Council

The Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC) is an international treaty organization established to represent the interests of United States and Canadian Athabaskan member First Nation governments in Arctic Council forums, and to foster a greater understanding of the common heritage of all Athabaskan peoples of Arctic North America. AAC is one of six Permanent Participants to the Arctic Council.

The AAC was formed in 2000 and the founding members include: Council of Yukon First Nations, Dene Nation, Kaska Tribal Council, and 15 Alaskan Tribal Governments. AAC membership represents approximately 45,000 Athabaskan peoples whose historical range was 3 million square kilometers.

Strategic priorities of the AAC are primarily climate change, biodiversity, and contaminants. In accomplishing our goals, AAC works in partnership with Indigenous organizations, communities, governments, researchers, and environmental non-governmental organizations around the world.

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Gwich'in Council International



The Gwich'in Council International (GCI) was established as a non-profit organization in 1999 by the Gwich'in Tribal Council in Inuvik, NWT, to ensure all regions of the Gwich'in Nation in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Alaska are represented at the Arctic Council, as well as to play an active and significant role in the development of policies that relate to the Circumpolar Arctic.

The founding members of GCI includes six Alaskan Gwich'in communities (Arctic Village, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, Birtch, Circle and Venetie) two Gwich'in representative bodies in Canada — Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation representing Vuntut Gwitchin in Old Crow, Yukon, and Gwich'in Tribal Council representing four communities in the Beaufort Delta region in the Northwest Territories. In total, the Gwich'in Council International founding members represent approximately 9,000 indigenous peoples of Gwich'in descent. The GCI Secretariat rotates between the Gwich'in Tribal Council in Inuvik, NWT and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation in Old Crow, Yukon

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