



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MEETING ON CLIMATE CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 24th-26th, 2016, Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island gathered in Amiskwaciwaskahikan, Edmonton, Alberta, Treaty 6 Territory, to discuss climate change, its impact on our communities and our collective rights, and to derive from our Indigenous knowledge how we will address it from a rights-based approach. We discussed solutions to the serious issues our communities are facing to begin the process of developing a collective Indigenous Climate Action Plan.

IN CANADA, THIS WAS THE FIRST MEETING OF ITS KIND TO BE HELD ON CLIMATE CHANGE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND FOCUSED ENTIRELY ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

The Indigenous Climate Action: Indigenous Peoples Meeting on Climate Change, was held in Amiskwaciwâskahikan, Edmonton, Alberta, from 24 – 26 January 2016. The meeting brought together more than 130 Indigenous peoples from various regions across Canada and the United States to exchange their knowledge and experience in adapting to the

impacts of climate change and newly developed climate change policy and commitments, and to develop key messages and recommendations to be articulated into the development of an Indigenous Peoples Action Plan on Climate Change.

In Canada, this was the first meeting of its kind to be held on climate change, and climate change policy and focused entirely on Indigenous peoples. The entire event and agenda was crafted primarily by Indigenous peoples, the presenters were 99% Indigenous and even the venue was Indigenous-owned. The only other meeting of this kind and magnitude was the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit

on Climate Change, held in Anchorage, Alaska.

Each of the participants were invited to provide their individual experiences on the impacts of climate change in their region. We went further to discuss the challenges to addressing climate change, to participating in climate change policy development, to successfully employing adaptation strategies, and for more direct involvement in the development of climate change strategies. Panel presentations and keynote presentations were structured to provide briefings on the current local, national and international processes by various UN and Government bodies to address climate change through adaptation and mitigation policies and frameworks.



THEMATIC BREAK-OUT SESSIONS WERE ORGANIZED TO ADDRESS FOUR KEY AREAS:

1. Understanding the impacts of climate change;
2. Understanding how current mechanism to address climate change including the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP) including Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are and are not being utilized;
3. Challenges to meaningful participation as Indigenous peoples in current climate change discourse at the local, national and international levels; and
4. Proposed solutions to address challenges faced at the local, national, and international levels and the next steps necessary for the development of an Indigenous Climate Action Plan.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, participants made commitments to continuing to work towards the development of an Indigenous Climate Action Plan by way of additional gatherings, educational events, and webinars.



OVERARCHING QUESTIONS AND KEY MESSAGES

The key messages from each of thematic sessions were as follows:

- How is Climate Change impacting your community? Climate change is posing significant threat to Indigenous peoples' food security and food sovereignty; and Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination. Impacts currently felt include changing migratory patterns of species essential for cultural and sustenance survival, temperature increases, precipitation changes, disappearing snow cover, rising sea levels, unpredictable weather and seasons, increased floods, droughts and extreme weather. These climate-related shifts are causing significant changes in animal and fish population, behavior and migration as well as on ecosystem integrity.
- What steps are communities taking to address climate change (if any)? Land, water, and cultural practices are essential for effective action to mitigate and combat climate change. Indigenous communities are proactive in stewarding their traditional territories despite ongoing challenges presented by the continued legacy of colonization and perpetual limited resources. Many communities are applying community based monitoring and land use studies to better understand the severity of impacts on the water, land, air and species. Nations are employing various methodologies including research, legal recourse, strategic partnerships, and program development to find effective ways to develop mitigation and adaptation plans.
- What do you need in the future to address climate change? Indigenous communities expressed the need to be empowered to develop, implement and assess their own responses to climate change, grounded in Indigenous spirituality, culture and worldview. This demands a process of decolonization which addresses the imbalanced relationship between Indigenous communities and the Canadian Government, including but not limited to: the funding arrangements under the Indian Act which are earmarked with pre-determined mandates from the Canadian Government. At the time of the Meeting, those mandates do not expressly include climate change.
- What are the gaps and challenges to addressing climate change and utilizing the UNDRIP? There is a need for a collective approach, however there are challenges to how this would take place given the barriers of the current colonial structures of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Natural Resource Transfer Agreement(s) (NRTA), and provincial and federal jurisdictions. Language barriers and funding limitations are major issues and must be addressed for communities to undertake their own analysis of the interpretation and implementation of UNDRIP.
- What opportunities exist for utilizing UNDRIP to address climate change? It was discussed as both a sword and a shield. UNDRIP could be used to leverage recognition and revitalization of Indigenous laws, language and teachings, and have them take effect within our communities and to non-Indigenous governments and industries (ie. water laws, land use to specific Indigenous legal orders such as the Save the Fraser Declaration, etc). Secondly, there was an expressed need to make UNDRIP and its principles accessible to communities, from youth to elders, and grassroots to leadership, in order for it to be properly utilized and not undermine community unity and development.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

One of the overarching goals of the meeting was to determine if people were prepared to develop an Indigenous People Climate Change Action Plan through the development of a common position from the Indigenous participants at the meeting. Over the course of the meeting we posed questions to participants on what an Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Action plan would look like and what would be needed in order for us to achieve this. Below is an overview of the key questions and responses.

1. What are the shared goals, vision, and values of an Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Action Plan? A vision that was shared across the board by all voices was the need to return to our Indigenous Natural Laws and reconnect with the laws we are guided by from the Earth. What is needed is a mandate that reflects the protection and preservation of the land, air, water, sacred fire, forest, animals, fish, medicines, plants and in return ultimately protect ourselves, our children, and our future generations. It is important to create and maintain strong relations with each other and honour each other's diversity by advocating for Nation to Nation alliances and offering our support to others where needed. An overarching goal was that we need solutions that not only stop climate change but contribute to cultural and economic survival within a changing climate and doing so by honouring our time tested technologies and the knowledge of our ancestors.
2. What kind of action strategies would help mobilize your community to address climate change?: There were many ideas that came up across the different groups however, similar to the goals, vision, and values the participants stressed the need to keep action strategies grounded in Indigenous Natural Law and guided by traditional knowledge. Some overarching suggestions included renewable energy projects, self sustaining energy projects (energy democracy), research and data collection, education and awareness, increased work on food sovereignty and security, conservation strategies, government lobbying, community partnerships, and a strong desire to push for full recognition of the rights and title of Indigenous people via the implementation of UNDRIP and Free, Prior and Informed Consent.
3. What kinds of tools and resources would be necessary for your community to implement an Indigenous Peoples Climate Change Action Plan?: Participants identified a wide range of needs that would assist in their ability to adopt and implement climate action strategies. These include basic organizing support and supplies, increased financial and human resources, employing our own people, education and knowledge including Land and Traditional Use Studies; web based resources (webinars and podcasts), GIS mapping, and climate modelling, and more direct community engagement.



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' MEETING ON CLIMATE CHANGE RECURRING THEMES AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

Over the course of the meeting, participants shared a range of stories and evidence regarding the impacts of climate change, and our exclusion as Indigenous peoples from current climate change policy discussions and strategies. There was abundant sharing about the success of various adaptation strategies built on traditional knowledge. The individual contributions were essential to the discussion and goals of the conference. While we did our best to capture these moments through notes and video recording it is not possible to adequately reflect all the information presented, discussed, and generated at

this meeting in an executive summary. However, we are able to feature some prominent themes and points featured throughout the Meeting. These included:

- Indigenous peoples have contributed the least to climate change;
- Indigenous peoples are the most impacted by climate change because they live more closely to the land and secondarily are usually the most socio-economically impacted (disadvantaged);
- The role of Indigenous peoples in addressing

climate change through our knowledge, experience, and rights over land and development needs to be fully incorporated into current proposed policies and actions to address climate change;

- There is a lack of relevant and readily available information on the impacts of climate change on and for Indigenous peoples;
- There is a lack of relevant and readily available information on the climate change mitigation and adaptation actions taken by Indigenous peoples.

NEXT STEPS:

To effectively address climate change, it is clear that Indigenous peoples must be empowered with decision making power to develop policies and mitigation strategies. This may not be an easy task, but it is an essential one that must be a prioritized if we want to create a future that ensures energy, food, and water security and is legally grounded with protections for generations to come.

There needs to be a more robust and vigorous process to adequately include Indigenous peoples in the development of any and all measures to understand climate change,

to reduce or mitigate climate change, and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This can be done through:

- Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP) at all levels of decision making and government.
- Increased access to resources (funding and capacity) for Indigenous communities to undertake the necessary research and studies to develop sovereign and independent climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

- Increased public education within the general public on the direct and indirect impacts of climate change, climate change policies, and proposed mitigation and adaptation strategies on the rights of Indigenous peoples.
- Increased implementation of renewable energy projects in Indigenous communities
- Direct community engagement within Indigenous communities using an Indigenous Rights-based framework to learn about climate change and develop climate solutions.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples worldwide are facing extreme changes to their lives, livelihoods and culture. This is largely due to climate change, colonization and the neo-liberal agenda of today's political landscape. Now more than ever, it is time for our people to rise up and take back our roles as stewards and caretakers. Climate change is one of the current leading political narratives and yet to date, climate change as a discourse has not been inclusive of Indigenous values, knowledge and voices. There has been a disconnection in the development of climate solutions and the real life experience for communities who live with the impacts of fossil fuel extraction and climate change.

The Indigenous Peoples Meeting on Climate Change held in Amiskwaciwaskahikan, Edmonton, Alberta, Treaty 6 Territory is a step towards addressing the disconnection between the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and the efforts to address climate change. We brought together over 130 Indigenous people from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Northwest Territories and New Brunswick, as well as participants from the United States to discuss climate change, climate policy and our independent and sovereign rights as Indigenous peoples.



Indigenous Climate Action

Climate change is the largest challenge humanity has ever faced and it is Indigenous peoples, land based peoples, that are feeling the impacts first and foremost. However, there has been little research or engagement work done to fully understand the true impacts of climate change on the rights, title, and survival of Indigenous land based cultures and identity. Furthermore there is inadequate support for Indigenous-led initiatives that are enacting climate solutions.

Participants concluded with a unified stance that future climate change action and policy must uphold Indigenous Natural Law and ensure that Indigenous communities are informed about the important conversations/negotiations that are being made to address climate change and the potential impacts they have on our rights and future opportunities. Next steps were outlined with a commitment from Indigenous Climate Action to continue to engage and inform our communities as widely as possible so we can engage effectively within the strategies, plans and policies that are being developed to address climate change.

ABOUT INDIGENOUS CLIMATE ACTION

Indigenous Climate Action is an Indigenous-led initiative, that is not only helping to fill in the gaps between the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and the policies and strategies being developed to address climate change, but also asserting an Indigenous worldview into the climate discussion and applying Indigenous knowledge towards evolving climate solutions.

As a coalition and network, we support Indigenous-led climate change strategies and mitigation plans, while at the same time amplifying the voices of Indigenous Climate Leaders to ensure that Canadian provincial and federal governments hear loud and clear that we will no longer sit quietly while decisions are made that directly impact our

rights and our future.

Our initial meeting in January 2016 was coordinated by a steering committee comprised of Eriel Deranger (Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation), Jesse Cardinal (Kikino Metis Settlement), Crystal Lameman (Beaver Lake Cree Nation), and Melina Laboucan-Massimo (Lubicon Lake Band) - all Indigenous women from tar sands impacted communities. The event was financially supported by Treaty 8 Livelihood Office, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Keepers of the Water, Honor the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, 7th Generation Fund, Womens Donor Network, Global Green Grants, Lush Cosmetics, and 350.org

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