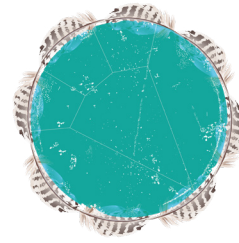


Statement of the Arctic Peoples' Conference 2023

50th anniversary of the first circumpolar meeting of Arctic Indigenous Peoples
Ilulissat, Kalaallit Nunaat, July 20-21, 2023



Convened by the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Saami Council, Gwich'in Council International, Arctic Athabaskan Council, and Aleut International Association.

We, the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic have gathered to celebrate and pay respect to the first Arctic Peoples' Conference convened fifty years ago wherein we met, discussed, and determined to safeguard our identity, our rights, our values, and our future, consistent with our long-held responsibilities.

The Arctic is our homeland. Our traditional territories cover the entire Arctic region. Over thousands of years, we have nurtured reciprocal, symbiotic, and respectful relationships between our Peoples and the Arctic environment, and we have transferred our knowledge through countless generations. Our cultural identities, our languages, our values, our spirituality, and our overall mental and physical wellness are tied to our environment, of which we are an intimate part.

We celebrate our original foresight, unity, and above all, our inherent right to self-determination as distinct Peoples. We have survived, and thrived, through hundreds of years of colonization, and emphasize that many challenges and colonial systems remain to be dismantled. We emphasize the rights of Arctic Indigenous Peoples, our unique relationship to the Arctic, and our commitments to cross-border and people-to-people cooperation in the region. Over the past five decades, originating from our traditional territories, we have consistently raised our voices within diverse national and international arenas due to the urgent need to inform and influence the challenges facing our Peoples and the Arctic.

We reaffirm our interdependent, interrelated, interconnected, and indivisible rights as affirmed by the United Nations (UN) in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including our right to self-determination, which is the pre-requisite for the exercise and enjoyment of all of our human rights as Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

Enhanced Engagement, Partnerships, and Allies

As Arctic Indigenous Peoples, we reflect on our contributions to various national and international governing bodies and how our way forward was paved by the people, now elders, who first came together to envision a better future.

“The conference proposes to form a Circumpolar Body of Indigenous Peoples to pursue and advance our shared and collective interests. We emphasize that we are profoundly concerned about protecting now the interests of succeeding generations of our peoples. As a consequence, this conference has resolved to form a Working Committee consisting of representatives of each group” (Arctic Peoples' Conference, 1973).

We, as founding members of the Arctic Council, remind the co-founders that our consensus must be a prerequisite for any decision on all levels of the organization and that making decisions without consensus undermines its purpose and integrity.

We reaffirm the necessity of our engagement through the Enhanced Participation Process in the United Nations, which

aims to ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in UN processes and in particular, within the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. We additionally commit to exploring opportunities to reconvene the Arctic Peoples' Conference and reaffirm our interests in arenas such as the Arctic Leaders' Summit.

Rights to Wellbeing

As Arctic Indigenous Peoples, we emphasize the strength of our identities, cultures, languages, and values in securing our own wellbeing. We call upon States and governmental authorities to acknowledge the deterioration of our social conditions under colonization, and to proactively address the challenges faced by our Peoples. We recognize the need for enhanced support and resources in the areas of education, training, employment, housing, health, including mental health and suicide prevention, and safety and social wellbeing.

We reiterate Indigenous women's right to bodily autonomy and that violations against the reproductive health of Indigenous women are intrinsically tied to our collective rights as Peoples. This is also a uniquely critical issue to LGBTQIA2S+ and gender non-conforming persons.

Rights to Lands, Waters, and Natural Resources

We urge States and governmental authorities to recognize our right to cultural security and integrity, and to take positive actions to recognize, enhance, and facilitate formal action to recognize and demarcate Indigenous lands and territories in order for us to maintain our own activities as well as our right to determine our own priorities for development, which should be understood as not confined to economic development. We assert that the environmental degradation of our homelands through outside pollution, contamination, erosion, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss will not be tolerated.

“We request the obvious: that the governments of each state from which we come recognize our rights as peoples entitled to the dignity of self-fulfillment and realization. This further means that there must not be any displacement or interference with our rights by governments and/or industry, nor can there be any disturbance

to our lands. In any negotiations of the crucial issues, we expect participation in a position of full equality” (Arctic Peoples' Conference, 1973).

Connection to Marine Environment

We emphasize that the Arctic is connected to the global marine ecosystem through migrations of marine and freshwater birds, mammals, and fish, ocean currents and global ocean circulation patterns. The Arctic marine ecosystem feeds the global marine ecosystem through short but incredibly productive seasons. The unique polynyas and their importance to our Arctic species are also vital to global species, and in turn, the health of all oceans.

We bear witness to the collapse of critical marine species, including the salmon crash in rivers such as the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Deatnu, and call on government authorities to institute equitable management to ensure healthy ecosystems, restoration of these species and our food security. As Arctic Indigenous Peoples, we have a direct, spiritual relationship with oceans, coastal seas, and the marine environment. We retain inherent rights to these territories and resources as affirmed in the UNDRIP, among other international covenants.

Impacts of Climate Change

We urge continuing work and commit to contributing within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Arctic Council, and related intergovernmental fora to address Arctic Indigenous Peoples concerns and the cumulative effects of climate change. We call upon States and governmental authorities to recognize our contributions, including Indigenous Knowledge, as well as our innovations and solutions, which must be shared, communicated, and manifested to prevent, mitigate, and adapt to climate change impacts across the Arctic. In addition, we are heavily affected by the accelerating biodiversity loss, well documented through the work within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

We unequivocally call for climate justice, recognizing that we, as Arctic Indigenous Peoples, have not been the main contributors to human-induced climate change, yet our livelihoods and ways of life are directly and dramatically impacted by its effects. We urge

States, governmental authorities, corporations, research institutions and civil society to empower Arctic Indigenous Peoples to lead efforts to address climate change that are in line with our rights, Indigenous Knowledge, and ways of life.

Colonialism and Climate Change Response

In unity, we acknowledge the varied, cumulative impacts of colonialism and climate change on our Peoples. Climate change cannot be an excuse to infringe on our distinct rights as Indigenous Peoples. We assert the urgent need to overcome the land encroachment, resource extraction, renewable energy production, and protectionist conservation that is undertaken at the expense of Indigenous Peoples' reality, which is a process known in some contexts as green colonialism. This includes the development of renewable energies and rare earth mineral mining on our lands without our consent, and the proliferation of marine protected areas that are not Indigenous led.

Our Future

As Indigenous Peoples organizations, we support our youth and their right to a positive future. We reaffirm the role of Arctic Indigenous youth in the future of our homelands, our peoples, and our ways of life. We reflect on our right to an equitable, ethical, fair, just, and meaningful future in which our youth are empowered to lead our people to thrive in sovereignty.

We affirm that the green transition cannot be bought with Indigenous lands, resources, or lives, as it challenges the personal decisions of our Indigenous youth and their possibilities to take on our ways of life. In unity, we aspire to equal participation for Indigenous youth in any and all processes relating to Indigenous futures.

As Arctic Indigenous Peoples, we honor those who are now our elders, who first came together in unity, and had the vision and foresight to pave the way for our Peoples at the first Arctic Peoples' Conference. Likewise, we celebrate our Arctic Indigenous youth in shaping the world that we will leave for future generations. We welcome increased dialogue between the generations to grow the capacity of our youth. Additionally, it is urgent that our hope is not stifled by the ongoing suicide and mental health crisis amongst past and current generations. We commit to addressing the issues raised in this statement, as empowering, supporting and including Indigenous youth in decision-making processes saves lives and will strengthen us all.

Our youth are a massive force for hope in the Arctic, and now is the time for States, governmental authorities, corporations, research institutions and civil society to heavily weigh the messages, priorities, and perspectives of our youth and to empower them to leadership and success.

Not least of all, we stand in unity for a future in which we will continue to thrive.