



**.IPCCA.**

Indigenous Peoples' Biocultural Climate Change Assessment Initiative

*Creating Connections Between Local Indigenous Biocultural Realities and Complex Global Systems*

## **SEVETTIJARVI DECLARATION**

On 25-30 September 2011, representatives of indigenous peoples' local assessments carried out in China, Ecuador, Finland, India, North America, Panama, Peru and Thailand under the Indigenous Peoples Biocultural Climate Change Assessment (IPCCA) initiative met in the community of Sevettijärvi, located in the boreal forest of North East Finland. The meeting was hosted by the Skolt Sámi Nation and Snowchange Cooperative. IPCCA members shared emergent findings from their local assessments and discussed adaptation and mitigation options for indigenous peoples, integration of biocultural dimensions in assessments, and approaches and strategies for addressing climate justice. As a result, recommendations for future actions were developed.

From our diverse but united perspectives we conclude that the global climate system is in a state of deepening crisis. We salute the work of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and other international scientific assessments. We stress that the complex relationships between conditions of the forests, water systems and climate need to be first and foremost understood from the perspectives and worldviews of the most vulnerable, such as indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities, who are on the frontlines of climate change.

Locally, we see our calendars shifting, ecosystems and species disappearing, food shortages, cultural disruption and destruction of livelihoods. For example, on Skolt Sámi lands, waters don't freeze in the same way anymore, and in the autumn, instead of proper snow cover, ice rain falls on the ground, impacting reindeer food cycles. In the Republic of Sakha-Yakutia, Siberia, Russia, in the lands of the Chukchi reindeer herders, the permafrost is melting, having major implications for global climate change and weather systems as millions of tons of greenhouse gasses which are currently trapped in the permafrost will release additional emissions into the atmosphere. In Kuna Yala, Panama, sea level rise is threatening the existence of Kuna communities located on coral islands and livelihoods based on marine, coastal and forest ecosystems. Implementation of REDD projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon are violating the collective rights of indigenous peoples, such as the right to free, prior and informed consent. Impacts are severe in mountain ecosystems, such as in the Peruvian Andes, where the ecological range of native potatoes and other crops are shifting, leading to species extinctions and endangering the food security and culture of the Quechua peoples. Across the world, indigenous peoples' crops and agricultural cycles, the basis of their food security, are similarly disrupted, such as millets and pulses of the hilly forest based Adivasis in India and maize and rice of indigenous peoples of the mountain regions of South West China and Thailand. In Pacific North America the loss and warming of freshwater systems and ocean acidification is directly resulting in increased loss of cultural and ecological keystone species, especially the salmon. Climate change is also resulting in the re-emergence of life-threatening diseases such as Malaria and Dengue. Our Elders and spiritual leaders tell us that the world as it is, will never be the same.

However, in spite of these deepening crises, emerging trends of biocultural resilience, resurgence and re-diversification of our ecosystems, give us hope that we can develop creative solutions for our communities and ultimately for the continuing existence of all life on Earth. Our indigenous efforts must be matched with concrete steps by nations around the world to reduce consumption patterns and change the paradigm of development based on economic growth, the drivers of human induced climate change.

### **The Importance of Indigenous Peoples and their Initiatives:**

We affirm that indigenous peoples continue to make major contributions to the understanding of climate change. The IPCCA is an example of how indigenous communities

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are undertaking assessments on their own terms. Intercultural methodologies that bridge traditional knowledge and Western science provide essential local information to assess climatic conditions and trends. We stress that these efforts must be led by indigenous peoples and local communities and mainstreamed into international and national climate change assessments and policy processes.

We alert that recent treaties such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) establishes international minimum standards for the respect, protection and fulfilment of indigenous peoples' rights. Indigenous knowledge systems are recognized as based on the distinctive spiritual relationship that indigenous peoples have with their territories, and should be respected and considered in climate change assessments and development of adaptation and mitigation responses. This UN Declaration obliges all UN scientific and technical bodies, such as the IPCC, to appropriately include indigenous knowledge in assessment reports of climate change, such as the upcoming Fifth Assessment Report.

We therefore:

- Call upon the IPCC to include an independent chapter on indigenous knowledge written and developed by indigenous peoples. The chapter should provide an assessment of how climate change affects indigenous livelihoods and rights, in view of developing adaptive strategies based on indigenous peoples spiritual, cultural and ecological values.
- Request the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) to formally request the IPCC to include a specific chapter on indigenous peoples. The UNPFII should also establish a Traditional Knowledge and Practice body involving indigenous leaders, educational institutions, experts and scholars, to guide its work and that of other UN processes.
- Request national governments to provide full support to indigenous peoples' own assessments and to invest in education and research institutes that empower indigenous voices in climate change science and policy.
- Alert indigenous peoples of the deepening inequities between Western science and traditional knowledge in climate change science and policy. We call upon indigenous peoples' organisations to communicate the inequities to the general public and powerful institutions such as the IPCC and to make all efforts to redress the balance of power.

### **Climate Change and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:**

We celebrate the adoption, in September 2007, of the UNDRIP as the culmination of decades of indigenous peoples' struggle for the recognition of their rights. The rights enshrined in the Declaration apply to all proposed adaptation and mitigation solutions and should serve as the international minimum standards for respect, protection and fulfillment of indigenous peoples' rights. Through respecting rights, we can build indigenous responses to climate change based upon traditional knowledge and the voices of youth, women and Elders. Recognising that indigenous women are being impacted differently and more by climate change, we promote a gendered approach that seeks climate justice for the most vulnerable. We call upon all governments to implement the Declaration and hold all international institutions accountable for its full implementation in climate change adaptation and mitigation projects.

We strongly reject false solutions such as REDD/REDD+, which threaten our livelihoods and adaptive strategies, and note that the Declaration's founding principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent should be the baseline for any mitigation or adaptation intervention within indigenous communities and territories. Unlike REDD/REDD+, forest tenure and governance by indigenous peoples has been proven to reduce illegal logging and creates economic

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benefits from sustainable forest use as well as strengthening livelihoods and food security. In support of indigenous responses to the climate crisis, we demand policies and legislation that ensure indigenous forest governance and nurture forest biocultural systems.

### **Redressing Injustices to Eastern Sámi Peoples:**

We salute the UN Commission on Human Rights Moratorium on the slaughter of reindeer of the Inari Sámi of Nellim issued on September 23, 2011. In addition to the 2005 Moratorium on logging in the same area, this is a historical turn of events in the development of Sámi rights in Finland. We wish to recognize this significant victory and urge the government of Finland to recognise the land and water rights of the Sámi as enshrined in international law. This process should be based on a full-scale land use and occupancy study of international standards.

We are deeply concerned by several disturbing processes which threaten the existence of the language, culture and lands of Eastern Sámi peoples. The Eastern Sámi have demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive past genocidal trends both in Finland and Russia. Now their homeland is becoming a geopolitical hotpsot due to the opening of the Northeastern Passage. Extensive mining plans and construction of a pipeline on the Kola Peninsula of Russia as well as development of off shore oil and gas exploration in the Barents Sea constitute direct threats to the ecosystems and the people of the area.

Now the very survival of the Eastern Sámi Nations and their homelands is under threat. We urge the world community and especially the UNPFII to investigate the situation of the human and Indigenous rights of the Eastern Sámi peoples in Russia and Finland. On the basis of this we demand that the governments of Russia and Finland commit to redressing centuries of injustice through jointly implementing the UNDDRIP with the Eastern Sámi peoples.

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