

Shaping Change, Adapting to Change: Indigenous Peoples and the Arctic Council



Arctic Athabaskan



Gwich'in
Council
International



AUGUST 2002

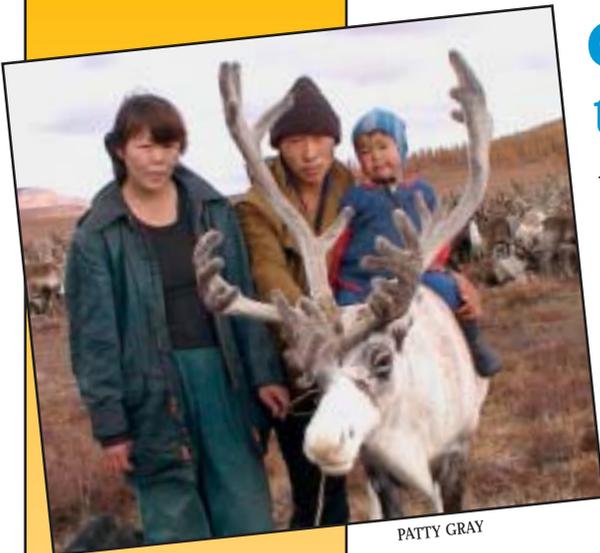
Climate Change: the threat to Arctic Peoples

The Arctic is our home. We, the Indigenous Peoples of the circumpolar region, have occupied and used our lands since prehistoric times. We have shaped our ways of life to adapt perfectly to challenging Arctic conditions. Despite the darkness, severe weather, vast distances and limited resources, we have thrived in our environment and developed rich and unique cultures based on our connection to our lands and waters.

Now we are challenged once more, as changes not of our making are reshaping our Arctic home. We have seen new species of insects and animals move into our regions, potentially displacing the species on which we rely and upsetting our ecosystems. We see changes to snow cover and sea ice, affecting our abilities to maintain traditional links and routes between communities, and disrupting harvesting rhythms. Many of our coastal communities are at risk from rising sea levels, increasing erosion, and disappearing permafrost.

Climate change is already beginning to affect our lives, economically, socially, and culturally. It threatens our fisheries, our ability to harvest wild food from the land, to herd reindeer. These and other traditional activities are our cultural lifeblood. They are not just economic choices; they are a fundamental and integral part of who we are as peoples.

People in our communities want to know how we can adapt to these changing conditions and maintain our cultural identities. At the same time, we want to know how we can slow down and manage the changes in our environment. To find those answers, we are pooling resources and finding new ways to work with Arctic states to ensure that our interests are recognized and protected.



PATTY GRAY

Little boy on reindeer is Zhenia Pananto with his mom Larisa and dad Boris. They live on the tundra in Chukotka in Kaiettyn, an "obshchina" (that's a group of people, usually blood relations, living off the land).

"The world can tell us everything we want to know. The only problem for the world is that it doesn't have a voice. But the world's indicators are there. They are always talking to us."

Quitsak Tarkiasuk
Voices from the Bay



Becharof National Wildlife Refuge

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Our Home

The Arctic is culturally, politically, demographically and economically diverse, with settlements ranging from small communities to modern industrial cities. Indigenous Peoples live in all of these settlements. In the Arctic, Indigenous Peoples number 1.5 million out of a total population of 10 million. In some regions we are the majority, in others, a minority. Our regions have combinations of modern formal economies, such as resource extraction, and traditional informal economies, such as herding and hunting.

Published by the Arctic Council
Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat
www.arcticpeoples.org



Indigenous Peoples as Agents of Change

In the last few years the Arctic has become recognized as an indicator of global environmental health. Arctic Indigenous Peoples were critical to achieving this recognition, tirelessly travelling the world to tell people about both the traditional and scientific knowledge that gives evidence of the changes occurring in our homes. In May 2001, representatives of more than 100 states convened in Stockholm to sign a legally binding global agreement. The Stockholm Convention commits states to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of several persistent organic pollutants (POPs) including dioxins, furans, and PCBs. Arctic data played an important part in persuading the United Nations to sponsor negotiations. Much of this data was generated through the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment

Program and the Canadian Northern Contaminants Program. Arctic Indigenous Peoples played key roles in developing and implementing both programs. We helped decide what data to collect, we helped collect and interpret the data, and we helped formulate the necessary policy action.

The Stockholm POPs Convention singles out the circumpolar Arctic and Indigenous Peoples – the first global convention to do so. It is a major victory – and demonstrates the influence of Indigenous Peoples in addressing global problems.

Isaac Klengenberg of Kugluktuk on Contwoyto Lake, August 2001.



PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANÇOIS LANDRY.
COURTESY OF RESCAN
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD.

In the scientific assessment of global climate change, mostly only western science data has been seen as valid in the past. It is not enough. Regional examples, such as the work of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) and the Mackenzie Basin Impact Study (MBIS) have shown good regional recognition of the validity of traditional ecological knowledge.

2nd Snowchange Conference
Tampere, Finland,
February 2002

Meeting the Threat of Climate Change

The Arctic Council is conducting a four-year Arctic Climate Impact Assessment that will develop policy recommendations to the Arctic states. This assessment takes advantage of the strengths of Arctic Peoples by combining indigenous knowledge with scientific analysis, blending centuries of accumulated wisdom with the latest techniques to create a complete picture. The knowledge of Indigenous Peoples will be integrated into the analysis and will guide the development of policy recommendations.

Indigenous Peoples must be involved because we will be most directly affected by the choices that are made. One important part of the analysis is a series of case studies that illustrate in concrete ways the implications of climate change, and some of the hard choices it will require.

These indigenous perspectives will help to illustrate that vulnerability and resilience vary greatly from place to place, and from time to time. Indigenous Peoples are the human face of climate change in the Arctic.



Map was supplied by Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

Shaping Change,
Adapting to Change:
Indigenous Peoples and
the Arctic Council

“Right now the weather is unpredictable. In the older days, the elders used to predict the weather and they were always right, but right now, when they try to predict the weather, it’s always something different....”

Z. Aqqiaruq, Igloodik 2000
(quoted in *The Earth is
Faster Now: Indigenous
Observations of Arctic
Climate Change*)



ØYVIND RAVNA

A modern Norwegian Saami light lawvu and traditional chums.

Indigenous Peoples at the Arctic Council: A New Form of International Cooperation

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum established by the states whose borders cross the Arctic Circle — Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States.

It is a unique model for co-operation among national governments and Indigenous Peoples. Six organizations representing Arctic Indigenous Peoples have the status of Permanent Participants and maintain an equal footing with governments in the work of the Arctic Council. Indigenous Peoples influence the priorities and programs of the Arctic Council, recognizing our place in the international decision-making that affects our homes.



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

“At one point the heat came – it was above 100 degrees F, and it just killed all the fish in the lake through heat exposure. And we’ve experienced extreme weather, like cold spells or extreme heat waves. We’ve got four healthy seasons, winter, spring, summer and fall and now sometimes snow comes too early, sometimes it comes too late – like right now it’s coming too late.

“I’ve seen a lot of new growth of vegetation come into our area. Other insects and other birds and animals start coming in. Tree beetles came in and ruined a lot of trees in Alaska, and they had to be cut down. And

due to all the water draining, there’s a high potential for forest fires. There have been a lot of forest fires in our area. Also a lot of ice is melting sooner when the end of the summer comes around,” she said.

Sarah James, Gwich’in Alaska,
board member of the International Indian
Treaty Council and a member of
the Arctic Village Traditional Council

Woman Fishing
for Tom Cod in Alaska.

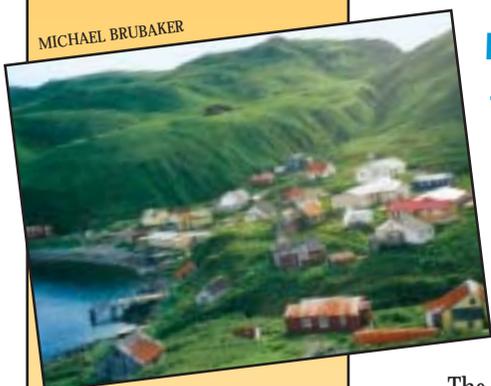
Who is at the Arctic Council?

- Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, United States
- six Indigenous Peoples' Organizations: Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Saami Council
- observers, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, NGOs, scientific and other international bodies

Who are the Indigenous Peoples at the Arctic Council?

- **Aleut International Association** represents the Aleut people who are indigenous to the Aleutian Islands. They live on both sides of the Bering Sea, in Alaska and Kamchatka in Eastern Russia.
- **Arctic Athabaskan Council** represents the interests of Athabaskan peoples of Arctic North America.
- **Gwich'in Council International** represents people living on both sides of the border between Canada and Alaska.
- **Inuit Circumpolar Conference** is the international organization representing the 150,000 Inuit living in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka, Russia.
- **Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON)** is the umbrella organization of 40 Indigenous peoples of the Russian North with a total population of over 200,000.
- **Saami Council** is a representative body for co-operation among the Saami of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Federation.

MICHAEL BRUBAKER



View of Atkas Old Village.

We cannot change nature, our past, and other people for that matter, but we can control our thoughts and actions and participate in global efforts to cope with these global climate changes. That I think is the most empowering thing we can do as individuals.

George Noongwook
The Earth is Faster Now

From the Arctic to Johannesburg – Building on the Arctic Council model

The Arctic was barely mentioned at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg suggests that despite political and scientific developments in the last 10 years, the Arctic is still not being accorded its rightful place in global debates, including those on climate change. Arctic Indigenous Peoples are working to change that.

The links between climate change and sustainable development in the Arctic make it imperative that both are considered in the context of the discussions in Johannesburg. The sustainability of our economies, both traditional and non-traditional, is threatened by climate change.

The Johannesburg Summit is supposed to examine developments since 1992 and answer a number of key questions, including: What has been accomplished since the Summit in Rio? Are we on the right track?

We believe that those attempting to answer these questions could benefit from examining the Arctic Council model. Since the Rio Summit, Arctic Indigenous Peoples have made great strides. New organizations have been established and new partnerships have been forged between indigenous organizations themselves, and with the Arctic states. Indigenous Peoples have made a difference in a number of global processes. We believe that the role Indigenous Peoples play at the Arctic Council is an important step, another way in which we can continue to make a difference. To truly grapple with the issues of sustainable development, we suggest that the Johannesburg Action Plan include recommendations for similar relationships between states and Indigenous Peoples around the world.

From my daily work as a reindeer herder in Sweden, I have seen that weather conditions change from one year to another. What is naturally climate variability and what is climate change caused by anthropogenic discharges of different kind of gasses, is difficult for me to know....

Will foreign trees and methods of growing them be introduced, and how will that affect the reindeers' pasture? The risk of losing our possibilities to claim rights to land and water are obvious if our ways to live are devastated by, for instance, a major change in climate.

Stefan Mikaelsson
reindeer herder, vice president of Saami Council, Boden, northern Sweden