



PRESS RELEASE

What about us?

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL condemns US failure to agree to Arctic Council Declaration

May 7, 2019 - Rovaniemi, Finland – The United States has set an unfortunate precedent by refusing to agree to compromise language that would have allowed the Arctic Council’s Finnish Chairmanship to issue a final declaration.

“Refusing to allow the words ‘climate change’ into the declaration is a moral failure,” said Dalee Sambo Dorough, International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which represents 165,000 Inuit in Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Chukotka, Russia.

“This is the first time the Arctic Council has failed to issue a declaration at the end of a two-year chairmanship, and it’s a serious blow to the future of what is supposed to be a consensus based body,” Sambo Dorough added. “Inuit are feeling the effects of climate change everyday.

“While the US Government concerns itself with semantics, playing games with words, our people are witnessing the adverse impacts of climate change. What about us and our reality?”

Although negotiations were supposed to result in the Rovaniemi Declaration, the US consistently opposed use of any language that would point to the need for action on climate change, which is already affecting Inuit and other Indigenous communities across the Arctic.

Instead of a declaration, the Ministers agreed to release a seven-paragraph joint statement that avoided mentioning any of the threats and challenges faced in the Arctic. However, a statement from the Finnish Chair released at the end of the meeting says “a majority of us regarded climate change as a fundamental challenge facing the Arctic,” adding there is an “urgent need” to deal with it.

“This position was taken by the US Administration despite the fact that the 2017 Fairbanks Declaration at the end of the US Chairmanship clearly cited the effects of climate change in the Arctic and ‘the need for action at all levels,’” said Monica Ell-Kanayuk, President of ICC Canada. “It’s unfortunate there’s no declaration but at least the Chair’s statement recognizes the urgency of dealing with climate change.”

The non-binding Chair’s statement also mentions the importance of the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on the consequences of failure to limit the average global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

“Despite previous statements out of the US Administration that climate change is a ‘hoax’ perpetuated by China, Inuit see the reality of climate change every day,” said James Stotts, President of ICC Alaska. “And the reality is our communities are struggling for survival.”

“We are worried about the undermining of the Arctic Council’s credibility at a time when genuine leadership and a strong Arctic voice is needed,” said Hjalmar Dahl, President of ICC Greenland.

“This is not just a question of words – it’s about the long-term survival of our culture and communities,” said Liubov Taian, President of ICC Russia. “Our traditional Inuit territory covers 40% of the Arctic region and it is essential that governments work with us to deal with the threat of climate change throughout Inuit Nunaat, our Arctic homeland.”

Climate change is not the only issue Inuit face in the Arctic. During the Ministerial meeting, ICC called on the Arctic Council to “address some of the issues important to us: wildlife management and food security; the infrastructure and social services deficit; physical and environmental health issues, including the horror of suicide; and culture and language protection.

“It’s time to address the problems faced by Arctic indigenous communities,” said James Stotts of Alaska. “It’s time to seriously listen to the solutions offered by ICC and the other Permanent Participants. It’s Inuit leadership expressed the unanimous view that given the challenges facing the region, now is the time for a unified response to the threat posed by climate change and its compounding spinoff effects. This need is underlined in the *Utqiagvik Declaration* passed by ICC delegates in Alaska last July at their 13th General Assembly. This unity is important for Inuit and all people of the Arctic, as well as the rest of the world.

When it comes to climate change, the Inuit leaders point out, what happens in the Arctic affects the whole of the planet.

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The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous Peoples’ Organization (IPO), founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 160,000 Inuit from Alaska (USA), Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. In regard to climate change, we believe that it is crucial for world leaders and governments to recognize, respect and fully implement the human rights of Inuit and all other Indigenous peoples across the globe.