



INTERNATIONAL INDIAN
TREATY COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



Wetlands in the San Francisco Bay Area are decreasing due to rising sea levels, threatening Indigenous Peoples' sacred places and traditional food resources

Indigenous Peoples' traditional teachings have long warned that if human beings fail to protect and care for Mother Earth and the natural world, the survival of humanity would be threatened. Today, increasingly severe impacts of climate change threaten ecosystems and food production around the world. In 2009, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food confirmed that "Climate Change constitutes the single most important threat to food security in the future."

Although island, arctic and desert ecosystems have suffered the most extreme impacts, Indigenous Peoples in all regions, both in rural and urban areas, are experiencing drastic effects on their homelands, ecosystems, traditional food sources and livelihoods.

**"Coal is the liver of our Mother Earth.
It needs to stay in the ground so she
can be healthy."**

— Diné Elder Roberta Blackgoat, Arizona

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' INTERNATIONAL WORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The United Nations (UN) first took note of the urgent need for the “protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind” in 1989. Greenhouse gasses generated by burning fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal) were identified as the primary cause, threatening global food supplies and the survival of many plant and animal species.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted after the 1992 World Conference on the Environment and Development, the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It recognized the urgent need for global action to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions. One hundred ninety-two States and two Regional Groups ratified the UNFCCC. These countries meet annually at Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to reach agreements on key issues such as emissions reductions, funding, and mitigation and adaptation.



Skin lesions caused by warming water killed 80% of returning Columbia River Salmon in 2015

Indigenous Peoples have been actively engaged in this process since its inception, while also protesting for not playing a formal decision-making role. Furthermore, they have consistently expressed their concerns about “market-based solutions” such as carbon trading and forest offsets, calling upon States to reject these false solutions and implement sustainable alternatives to truly reduce emissions while protecting the rights and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples.

Although they played no formal role in the negotiations, Indigenous Peoples participated actively in COP 21 in Paris (December 2015), where the Paris Agreement and Paris Decision were adopted. Key achievements were the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' rights in the preamble, and recognition of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and practices in Climate Change adaptation and mitigation. The Paris Agreement also affirmed the goal of holding global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels, which would protect Indigenous Peoples' ways of life, traditional foods, and ecosystems around the world.



Members of the LCIPP Facilitative Working Group at UNFCCC COP25, Madrid Spain, November 28th 2019

In December 2018, after years of difficult debate, the UNFCCC established the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) and its Facilitative Working Group (FWG) at COP 24 in Katowice, Poland. The FWG, consisting of 7 State representatives and 7 representatives selected by Indigenous Peoples from each region, is charged with operationalizing the LCIPP and facilitating the implementation of its functions related to exchange of knowledge and best practices, capacity for engagement, and climate change policies and actions. IITC's Executive Director Andrea Carmen was selected to represent North America Indigenous Peoples for the FWG's first 3-year term. For more information on the LCIPP and its work, log on to: <https://unfccc.int/LCIPP>.

THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources.” - Article 29

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, is the internationally accepted minimum standard for the dignity, survival and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration contains many provisions that affirm rights related to the causes, impacts and solutions to climate change. These include, inter alia, rights to self-determination; protection from forcible removal; protection of sacred sites and cultural practices; participation in decision-making that affects them; subsistence and traditional economic activities; health; conservation of vital plants and animals; traditional lands, territories and resources; conservation and protection of the environment; traditional knowledge and cultural heritage; Treaty rights; and free, prior and informed consent regarding development. Article 42 also calls upon UN member states, agencies and bodies to promote the Declaration's full application internationally and at the country level. The UN Declaration continues to be used by Indigenous Peoples to ensure that their rights are upheld and protected in climate change actions and responses at all levels.



The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), founded in 1974, is an Indigenous organization working for the protection of human rights, cultures, treaties and traditional lands from the local to the international levels. In 1977, IITC was the first Indigenous organization to receive Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and in 2011 was the first to be upgraded to General Consultative Status.

For more information on IITC's work on Climate Change, contact:

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Connect with IITC online: www.iitc.org or find IITC on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn by searching "International Indian Treaty Council."