

THE INUVIK DECLARATION

ON ARCTIC CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL ACTION:

December 5, 2008

Our Common Commitment:

We are united by our common commitment to a prosperous future for the Arctic and its peoples, and the urgent need for global action to prevent dangerous human-caused climate change. We recognize that the Arctic is a critical component of the global climate system, and that a changing Northern climate has worldwide implications. As such, we will work together to raise the profile of climate change impacts in the Arctic and to push for global action.

Humanity must come together to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas pollution and ensure that vulnerable communities and countries have the support they need to adapt and make a transition to a new energy economy. Industrialized countries like Canada must lead the way. We will work together to ensure that Canada rises to this challenge and does its fair share.

The Arctic Is Warming:

The Arctic is now warming rapidly with much larger changes projected. Climate change presents pressing problems for Arctic Indigenous peoples and residents, as well as risks to Arctic species and ecosystems.

Traditional knowledge complements science. Oral traditions present historic accounts of the local climate, plant and animal species, water regimes, and snow and ice conditions. Results from traditional knowledge and scientific research make us deeply concerned that:

- * Arctic vegetation zones are shifting;
- * Animal species' diversity, ranges, and distribution are changing;
- * Coastal communities and facilities are facing increased exposure to storms;
- * Thawing ground is disrupting transportation, buildings, and other infrastructure;
- * Indigenous communities are facing major economic and cultural impacts; and
- * The proposed increase in marine transportation and exploration threatens traditional whaling practices, marine species and waterfowl.

These changes create grave risks for all Arctic residents, and they represent an immediate threat to the safety and security of Northern Indigenous peoples. Changes in temperature and rainfall are already radically altering natural patterns, making many Indigenous peoples strangers in their own land and threatening their ability to live off the land as trappers, gatherers, fishermen and hunters. For many Northern Indigenous peoples, caribou is their life. It is their main source of food. It is their shelter and clothing. Today, there is growing uncertainty around the future of the traditional way of life.

Climate change is also making existing vulnerabilities worse by accelerating development and exploration that risks degrading traditional lands and waters, as well as compounding the problems associated with substandard housing, infrastructure and health systems in the North.

Change is being felt across Canada and around the world:

The Arctic is a barometer for global warming, and the scale of changes that Arctic people are experiencing today are beginning to be felt around the world. As climate change accelerates, Canada will face increasing risk of floods, heat waves, water scarcity, permafrost melt, rising sea levels and coastal erosion and flooding, vector-borne diseases, and a range of other impacts. Whatever benefits Canadian agriculture and forestry may experience, including longer growing seasons and warmer temperatures, will be negated by decreased soil moisture, increased insect infestations and more frequent forest fires, among others.

These changes will also be felt around the world, with often devastating impacts. The most impoverished communities and countries — those least responsible for creating the problem of climate change — will bear the heaviest burden if the world fails to act.

Humanity must limit the temperature increase:

If we act now, humanity has an opportunity to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. To do so, we must keep global average warming as far below 2°C as possible, relative to pre-industrial temperatures. Rising global average temperature is a key yardstick of global warming, and is the basis for projecting other impacts expected from human interference in the climate system, including regional temperature increase and sea level rise.

Given that all regions of Canada are warming more than the global average, and the far North will be warming at 2–3 times the global average, Canada has perhaps even more reason than other countries to be concerned about the extent of global temperature increase.

Without concerted action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution, the global average temperature could exceed pre-industrial levels by as much as 4°C – 6°C by the end of this century. This would create an extremely high risk of catastrophic impacts in Canada and around the world. The changes in the Arctic would be even more severe than the global average.

Canada must do its fair share:

The changes that we are witnessing are a call to action, and we will work together to ensure that Arctic residents have the support that they need to adapt to those impacts that are already inevitable. We recognize, however, that the only viable, long-term response to climate change is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas pollution worldwide, primarily by reducing fossil fuel use. Northerners are willing to do their fair share, but this must be a truly global effort.

Global greenhouse gas pollution must peak and begin to decline within the next 10 years. In order for this to happen, Canada and other industrialized countries must commit to targets to reduce greenhouse gas pollution to at least 25% below the 1990 level by 2020 and at least 80% below the 1990 level in 2050. Scientific analysis shows that these levels are the minimum commitment required from industrialized nations if the world is to have a chance of avoiding dangerous climate change.

These targets reflect the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”, as recognized in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. This principle recognizes historical differences in the contributions of developed and developing states to the problem of climate change, as well as differences in their respective economic and technical capacity to tackle the problem. Canada has repeatedly endorsed this principle and acknowledged that as an advanced industrialized country with high per capita greenhouse gas emissions, it has a responsibility to show leadership in reducing greenhouse gas pollution. Unfortunately, Canada has also repeatedly failed to live up to its promise. We will work to ensure that Canada embraces its obligations and sets a good example for the world.

To play a responsible part in the global effort against climate change, Canada must start with the right policies at home. The first step is to commit to the science-based targets outlined above; this commitment must be accompanied by a credible plan capable of reaching those targets.

Second, Canada must ensure that the necessary resources are in place to help Canadians adapt to those changes that are already inevitable. Northerners understand that even in the best emission reduction scenario, they will have to cope with climate change for at least the next 4 – 5 decades. Northerners have little choice but to adapt. In adapting however, Northerners will seek adaptations that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure environmental protection. The cost of adaptation will be high in social, cultural, and financial terms. The costs of adaptation in the North will likely be in the billions of dollars. Canada must commit significantly increased resources to Northerners to adapt and reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

Third, Canada must also pledge financial support to developing countries in their efforts to adopt clean technology and adapt to climate change. In particular, development initiatives should focus on the groups and regions hardest hit by climate change, including women, marginalized communities, and small island states.

A Responsible Role in the International Community:

The first phase of the United Nations Kyoto Protocol lasts from 2008 to 2012, and the international community is working towards adopting a new post-2012 global deal at UN climate negotiations in December 2009. We will work together to help bring about a strong and timely agreement.

At the UN negotiations in Bali in 2007, Canada found itself isolated for failing to recognize science-based emission reduction targets. Stronger policies at home, coupled with a willingness to play a leadership role internationally, are needed to make a positive contribution to the negotiation of a post-2012 global climate agreement in Copenhagen. Only a strong “Kyoto II” that aligns with the science of climate change is capable of protecting Canada’s Arctic and its peoples.

Conclusion:

As the Arctic receives increased attention and its local, territorial, international, and global importance is better understood, Northern Indigenous peoples and Arctic governments have responded by undertaking research and developing policies aimed at assuring themselves a sustainable future. An effective post-2012 climate agreement must protect Northern ways of life. We will work together in the coming months and years to make this a reality and ensure that Northern voices are heard at the international level.

Founding Signatories:

Gwich'in Council International

Arctic Athabaskan Council

Climate Action Network Canada – Réseau action climat Canada

Ecology North

Pembina Institute