

**Arctic Council**  
**Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs**  
**Tromsø, Norway**  
**29 April 2009**

**Introductory Remarks**

**Patricia Cochran**  
**Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council**

Mr. Chair, honorable ministers, Mr. Gore, fellow indigenous leaders, ladies and gentlemen:

Mr. Chair: Both the *Melting Ice Conference* that you co-hosted with Mr. Al Gore yesterday and the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change that the Inuit Circumpolar Council hosted in Anchorage last week sent a deeply important message to the world. This message was about respect. It was about respect for our earth, our seas, and our ice - and respect for the peoples who inhabit our planet.

As you know, Mr. Chair, sea ice has helped sustain Inuit for thousands of years. And now it is thinning and melting. We need the ice to access our resources and to sustain us. Ironically, and perhaps tragically, others need the ice to melt so that they can access easier travel routes and resources found deep beneath our world, the Inuit homelands.

You should have a copy of the Anchorage Declaration that over 500 indigenous individuals representing over 50 indigenous peoples, and coming from over 80 countries agreed to last week in Anchorage. The Declaration was also signed by UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann. In that document you will see references to respect. Respect for our rights as indigenous peoples, especially the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. When it came to creating climate change, we were not active participants. Today, when it comes to combating it, we are still often left out. While we are now named as stakeholders, I would remind those here that we are more than that. We are *rights* holders, Mr. Chair. We are land owners, resource owners; we have settlement and treaty rights and it is our right to be at the table on all matters related to the Arctic. I want to thank you, and commend you, Mr. Chair, for respecting our rights as permanent participants here at the Arctic Council table.

The last two and a half years, under your direction, have produced a lot of important work in the Arctic Council – and we look forward to that continuing under the new Danish chairmanship. And we look forward to exploring even further the central role Inuit can play in Arctic Council work. The Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium that was held in this city last year is an example of how ICC, who jointly hosted it with the Saami Council, of the kind of important work we can lead inside the Arctic Council. Our

language is deeply important to us, as is the language of climate change - and the language of rights.

Mr. Chair, as *rights* holders, Inuit have the right to determine their future. Rights to determine if and how the minerals, fish, marine mammals, tourism, and other things are developed in the Arctic.

As the Arctic has increasingly become the focus of states, industry, academics, and others, we have had to address for ourselves the questions of ‘who owns the Arctic?’, who has a right to traverse the Arctic?, and who has a right to exploit the resources in the Arctic and under what conditions?’ Each minister here should also have a copy of a *Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty* that addresses some of these questions.

ICC was founded in 1977 to celebrate the unity of Inuit across 4 countries, and to provide a collective voice addressing environmental, social, cultural, and economic policy matters that affect all Inuit. The Arctic sovereignty declaration spells out how we believe these policy matters – these *rights* holder matters – should be addressed with Inuit playing a central role, as we do here at the Arctic Council.

In closing, may I also suggest to my colleagues, that the sound of the A8 would be much sweeter to our ears if it was A8+.

Thank-you, Mr. Chair.