

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL
Dalee Sambo Dorough, PhD
Chair

Comments to Final Session of the Arctic Environment Ministers Meeting
October 12, 2018

First, I would like to thank the Finnish government for their work to date and their hospitality this week. I hesitate to use the word “ice breaker” especially as an Inuk, but this has been my first engagement with Environment Ministers and the work that will feed into outcomes that relate to the work of the Arctic Council. It has been illuminating

I’d like to acknowledge and echo the statement of our sister from the Saami Council, Asa, especially in relation to Indigenous knowledge and the role that it can play in the work of Environment Ministers.

I also want to acknowledge the comments made by our Indigenous brothers from the Russian Federation about communication. My experience at the UN was similar. The Indigenous peoples from the Russian Federation were always at a disadvantage because they did not have direct, timely access to documents, which ultimately impacts their ability to participate. Let’s be sure that this does not happen in relation to the work being done in the Arctic as well.

My comments will be overarching, as encouraged by the Chair. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input and to influence the language of the document that will emerge from this meeting. As you know, we’ve provided input in the lead up to this meeting. So, for now, I’ll make only a few broad comments related to climate change, pollution, and threats to Arctic biodiversity as well as all the other adverse impacts that we face in the Arctic.

In regard to the outcome document, specific and explicit reference to the role of Indigenous peoples in this overall work should be made.

Recognition of the fact that Indigenous peoples have the highest points of vulnerability in relation to all aspects of climate change, pollution, and threats to biodiversity. This is especially true in light of our dependence on the overall Arctic environment, both lands and waters. Both marine and terrestrial.

I would like to urge that all future work concerning the environment recognize the interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible nature of the environment as well as our relationship to the environment as Indigenous peoples. The impacts of climate change, pollution and threats to biodiversity also have interrelated impacts upon us, such as our health and well-being; our economies that are based on the environment; and other cultural aspects of our lives and our communities.

The ICC feels strongly about and specifically, respectfully requests consistent, uniform use of the term *Indigenous knowledge* as well as the further acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples can make a significant and distinct contribution as knowledge holders. Echoing the comments by our sister from Saami Council, immediate examples include treatment of the matter in the most recent version of the outcome document of this meeting. Some may have been present at the Arctic Biodiversity Congress wherein I addressed the problematic use of the term “local communities.” Indigenous peoples must be referred to explicitly as Indigenous peoples and our knowledge must be referred to Indigenous knowledge.

There is a need to build frameworks that consistently and meaningfully engage Indigenous peoples – frameworks that really ensure direct engagement of Indigenous peoples’ and their direct involvement in the Working Groups and any related bodies, some of whom contributed to the dialogue at the Arctic Biodiversity Congress as well as those that presented here. Indigenous peoples must be engaged at all stages and all phases of this work, from formulation of proposals, OR even more significant, Indigenous peoples should be the participants that determine the priorities for study and research, especially in relation to what is regarded as a threat or problem by Indigenous peoples. We talk about meaningful engagement, but let’s be sure that we’re actually doing it. Frameworks for doing so would ensure that Indigenous peoples are involved in formulation of proposed studies to its implementation to its finalization and to crafting conclusions and recommendations – essentially at every stage – Indigenous participation through and through. Here again, communication is critical.

Such frameworks also contribute to genuine community based and community driven research, which is a pivotal concourse, pivotal pathway, pivotal avenue that ensures the integral and status of Indigenous peoples and the manifestation of their knowledge.

In relation to marine protected areas, Indigenous approaches and understanding must be recognized and respected, including Indigenous led management. Indigenous management of the resources that we depend upon This is especially important to the Inuit as a maritime people, reliant on the marine environment, the ocean and coastal seas and specifically marine mammals. Any proposals for marine protected areas or the establishment of a network of marine protected areas must be responsive to the rights, interests and concerns of Inuit as Arctic Indigenous peoples.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to participate and to contribute to this gathering. It has been illuminating in terms of the work of each of you as ministers, your staff, the contributions of the individuals that work with the various Arctic Council working groups, from them I have learned a lot. In addition, it has been good to listen to and learn from our fellow Indigenous sisters and brothers and their diplomacy. Quyanaq.