



CAFF Biodiversity Congress
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Sustainable Utilization of Arctic Biodiversity - Reflections on an Ancient and Modern Relationship

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I would like to thank the organizers of the Arctic Council CAFF's Biodiversity Congress and the Norwegian Environment Agency for the invitation to participate in this important panel. My talk today is entitled "Sustainable Utilization of Arctic Biodiversity - Reflections on an Ancient and Modern Relationship".

I have been given two questions to answer:

"How do you see changes in Arctic ecosystems affecting ecosystems outside the Arctic?" and
"How do you see actions taken outside of the Arctic affecting Arctic ecosystems?"

I will address these in my presentation, but first I want to tell a little about ICC to give context to my answers.

Inuit are an international people. As the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), I represent more than 160,000 Inuit in Chukotka, Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Our relationship at ICC is based on a common culture and language. For most of human history the indigenous peoples of the circumpolar North have been at the top of the world, living their lives and carrying on their traditional livelihoods which are grounded in the connection to the land and to the wildlife that has sustained my culture for time immemorial. The Inuit or the circumpolar world meet every four years to plan and guide our actions. We invite others Arctic indigenous peoples, governments and scientists and we share and listen. We listen to what they have to offer and share with us and then collectively we develop a road map – so to speak – the Kitigaaryuit Declaration was signed by all four Inuit countries in Inuvik this past July.

I will return to this important document later in my talk as it has many articles that relate to Arctic biodiversity and the importance to Inuit to ensure sustainable harvests, healthy populations and access to the marine mammals, caribou, fish and berries that have sustained our bodies and souls for all time. The wildlife and plants of the Arctic are our food security. Our Governments speak of energy security – sources of energy that are nationally controlled, where

the prices can be regulated and are close to national consumers. Arctic wildlife is our energy security – it fuels our very existence.

The Kitigaaryuit Declaration details the importance of the Arctic to global processes of weather, atmospheric and ocean currents, and as breeding and feeding grounds for a multitude of global species of birds, fish, marine mammals, and territorial animals large and small. The Arctic ocean is anything but devoid of life – as multitudes of algae and microscopic animals, crustaceans, plants inhabit the cold and dark ice covered oceans. It is these building blocks that support the vast biodiversity of the Arctic.

We are currently witnessing unprecedented, rapid and unpredictable change in the Arctic and to this biological wealth of diversity. These changes are having important and far-reaching consequences not only for the region itself, but for the rest of the world. At the same time, the impacts to human settlements and communities, habitat loss in this vast ecosystem and fragmentation from infrastructure and industrial development, pollution and toxins, and invasive species infestations continue to have impacts on biodiversity in the region and in turn to global biodiversity.

As I answer the questions posed to the panel today I want you to bear in mind four key points:

- Inuit food security is dependent upon Arctic biodiversity and is our cultural identity
- Traditional knowledge and western knowledge are both needed for adaptive decision making;
- Community based monitoring has been ongoing as part of Inuit survival for thousands of years and is a valuable source of knowledge;
- Inuit must be part of any policy or research that involves or impacts Arctic wildlife.

The first question posed to this panel looks outward. How does the change in the Arctic impact the peoples and environments to the south? Suddenly or at least recently, interest in the Arctic is now wide-spread not because of the impacts necessarily on the Arctic environment, its biodiversity or its peoples - but rather because there is the realization that these changes may impact the insurance rates in Toronto, or that increased flooding in New York City or Venice may be related to global climate change and sea level rise from melting Arctic ice sheets and glaciers, that methane released from melting permafrost may enhance global climate change exponentially, that fish stocks in the north Atlantic may shift northward, that 90% of global bird species spend some part of their life in the Arctic – and that these birds are a valuable source of protein for people from Europe to New Zealand from Alaska to Chile. In fact many organizations from outside the Arctic, use Arctic species not as food but rather as means to raise funds for their activities – charismatic mega fauna – polar bears and seals are more

effective at loosening donation purse strings that factory raised farm animals. We all agree I am sure that the Arctic is a globally important ecosystem with globally important biodiversity – carbon fluxes, central Arctic Ocean gyres, and the north Atlantic conveyor belt – all phenomena that impact global processes and all processes in some state of flux in the Arctic. This global interest in the Arctic has all happened in a relatively short time over the past 10 or 15 years. Sure 300 years ago whalers came to the Arctic and almost destroyed every whale population, explorers looking for the Northwest Passage came, missionaries came but the real geopolitical interest is recent. First, the interest was to understand the impacts of climate change – now the interest is driven by global commodity process. Research now focuses more on how to develop the Arctic, rather than how the Arctic is changing. In fact, I think we can all agree it has changed. We welcome the collaborative research that helps us understand the change, how we can adapt to the change, how we can mitigate the challenges faced by the change and by the increase in traffic – ship traffic, tourist traffic, researcher traffic, exploration traffic, policy traffic. Inuit and other indigenous peoples have used and occupied the Arctic for thousands of years. They have observed the natural changes and cycles and health of wildlife stocks and the impact of climate and disease on these populations – you will no doubt, hear a great deal about these from many experts this week. For Inuit, we have faced starvation and famine - as well as times of plenty. Our oral history has been passed down from generation to generation – it has helped us survive and in fact even Amundsen attributed his South Pole success to the wisdom shared by his Inuit friends in Gjoa Haven. Inuit have been observing these subtle and more recently obvious changes for millennia. For the past 30 years however, our elders and our hunters have been speaking of rapid climatic changes that impact the ice, snow and quantity, quality and migration changes of species we depend on for food security – caribou, fish, marine mammals, birds. Our traditional knowledge has within it a wealth of information, of knowledge - that can together with western knowledge is needed to inform adaptive decision making.

We have been adapting and addressing the challenges of sustainable and effective wildlife management through a number of governance structures. Those that include Inuit, governments and scientists are the most effective. Collective knowledge in considering critical decisions that impact our wildlife is a necessity. Some examples of these structures include co-management boards, such as the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Fisheries Joint Management Commission etc. established through the Canadian land claim agreements, and the Greenlandic Home Rule Government department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture and its policies and programs to protect Greenlandic wildlife and shared stocks. In Russia, the Chukotkan Department of Use and Protection of Wildlife Resource works with communities and on shared stocks with Alaska. The problem is that these changes in the Arctic cannot be controlled in the Arctic they require actions not only within the Arctic, but far from the Arctic.

How do you see actions taken outside of the Arctic affecting Arctic ecosystems?

We have seen how pollutants from far away travel to the Arctic, we have seen how releases of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel use increase climate change in the Arctic, we are witnessing how the commodity prices of minerals and energy can increase exploration and development and shipping in Arctic waters.

We have witnessed the devastation to Arctic communities by animal rights efforts, threatening our food security. These activities are often supported by regulations and policies that restrict the species we can hunt, our traditional management practices based on conservation through use, and the ability to create economic opportunities from the bi-products of these food sources through trade restrictions.

Global agreements such as the Stockholm Convention and the Minamata Convention have real impacts on the health of the Arctic environment, its biodiversity and its peoples. We were part of these negotiations. The Convention on Biological Diversity recently announced the signing of the Nagoya Protocol that will in time hopefully protect the Access and Benefit Sharing rights of Inuit to the genetic resources of the Arctic. We have worked with CAFF on many projects reports and assessments as well there are a multitude of bilateral and multilateral environmental and wildlife agreements – shared stock agreements with neighbouring countries. Those that are the most effective has partnered with Inuit as partners and knowledge holders.

There are many people not from the Arctic who I am sure have the very best intentions and wish to “protect” the Arctic and its biodiversity and there are those who see the Arctic as a vast store house of non-renewable resources and as a governance vacuum.

For whatever reason, many new-comers to the Arctic see this “governance vacuum”, or see the Arctic as a region that should be considered the common heritage of mankind. These perceptions often overlook the people who live in the Arctic, the cultures that are deeply intertwined with the Arctic and are part of the overall ecosystem, and minimize the importance of existing governance and knowledge systems. For example, in my own country, Canada, Inuit are the largest landowners in the Arctic after the Government of Canada.

About 20% of the central Arctic Ocean can be considered international space. The rest of the land and sea in the Arctic is subject to the sovereignty and the sovereign rights of the 8 Arctic states. Inuit live in 4 of these Arctic states and have a variety of legal and political rights protected by domestic and international law.

In 2009 Inuit adopted a Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic. In that Declaration we stated that the conduct of international relations in the Arctic and the

resolution of international disputes in the Arctic are not the sole preserve of Arctic states and non-Arctic states. These matters are also within the purview of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic. Issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic have become tightly linked to issues of self-determination in the Arctic. Inuit and Arctic states must, therefore, work together closely and constructively to chart the future of the Arctic. But the Inuit voice is not just an Arctic voice. Inuit are part of the global family of indigenous peoples and we are also involved in promoting and protecting Indigenous Peoples rights through the United Nations. Inuit were pleased to see the UN General Assembly adopt the outcome document at the recent World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in New York in September.

The outcome document contains very important language. States commit themselves to make an effort to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples locally, nationally and internationally, in cooperation with indigenous peoples. I urge you to consider that the actions taken outside the Arctic may have real and dire consequences in the Arctic if indeed these are developed in the absence of true partnerships with and respect for the peoples who live there. Suppose the Inuit, Aleuts, Athabaskans, Saami, and numerous indigenous peoples of Russia convened a conference in your part of the world and laid out new ways for you to govern yourself, set new priorities for research and development in your communities, imposed new rules for how you protect your local environment and called for bans on which animals you can use on your farms and ranches. I suspect that you wouldn't pay much attention to us!

I would like you to take home two messages:

Firstly, for those that see the Arctic as empty wilderness or an open frontier where they have complete license to assert their own interests - a cautionary message. The Arctic is not empty, Inuit and other indigenous peoples call the Arctic "Nunnaᑦ" – home. We are willing to share the Arctic- but we are not willing to make it a protected area, of no touch, to satiate the consciences and ease the burden on action from those in the south- we will not support actions from a far that excludes our needs. We are the custodians of its land and biodiversity and we take this very seriously as it is our security - our nutrition - our life. We have established governance structures and hold fiduciary rights in many cases.

Secondly, I want to extend an offer of cooperation and collaboration. Inuit want to work with you. We want to share knowledge and ensure the sustainability of our collective resources. We welcome tourism – people to come and share the beauty and grandeur of the landscapes and the wildlife. We want to develop Inuit businesses that provide opportunities for our youth to stay in the communities, to raise families and to have hope. We want them to live a new Arctic where our youth can have one foot in the space age and one in the snow age. We want our wildlife populations strong and abundant so we can continue to depend upon them for

nutritious and wholesome food.

Inuit are aware that the Arctic has great renewable and non-resource wealth. We are also aware of the increasing global demand for Arctic minerals, hydrocarbons and living marine resources. Inuit have always adapted to change and we are determined to provide for the material and cultural well-being of Inuit into the future. This is why Inuit adopted the Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles In Inuit Nunaat in May, 2011. We are committed to the principles on resource development set out in this Declaration. Inuit expect all those who have or seek a role in the governance, management, development, or use of the resources of Inuit Nunaat to conduct themselves within the letter and spirit of this Declaration.

I want to go back to the Kitigaaryuit Declaration that I mentioned earlier. Inuit adopted this Declaration a few months ago in Inuvik. It provides a mandate to Inuit leadership to work for a future that includes successful economic, social and environmental conditions in the Arctic that reflect the central place of Inuit, Inuit culture, and Inuit values throughout Inuit Nunaat.

This Declaration contains the Inuit agenda for the next 4 years in relation to:

- the Arctic Council and other international fora;
- Environmental Stewardship;
- Safe Shipping and Fisheries;
- Sustainable Economic Development; Inuit Health and Well-Being;
- Food Security;
- Communication;
- Education and Language; and
- Traditional Knowledge and Science.

This Declaration has a few articles I wish to bring to your attention: On Sustainable Economic Development Recognize Inuit hunters in their ongoing struggle to adapt to the changing Arctic, and continue to speak forcefully for ethical and fair trade for our products, fight unnecessary attempts to limit use of our marine resources by listing them as endangered, and state our opposition to making the Arctic a wildlife preserve or any similar initiative that would undermine our wildlife economy; On Traditional Knowledge Direct ICC leadership to insist upon the utilization of Traditional Knowledge in scientific programs/reports and at all levels of relevant decision-making processes; On Community based monitoring... Direct ICC leadership to promote awareness of community-based monitoring activities rooted in Traditional Knowledge, and to work with its partners to develop a strategy and tools to implement the proper utilization of community-based monitoring and research; On Food Security Direct ICC leadership to advocate for improved access to sufficient Inuit traditional food sources, communicating the impacts of the nutrition transition on Inuit food security resulting from

changing economic and social conditions, contaminants, climate change, and regulatory decisions taken by others on polar bears, seals, and other marine and terrestrial mammals; On welcoming the world to an Inuit Summit on wildlife management... Direct ICC to plan and host an Inuit summit on wildlife management; Inuit are pragmatic we know to meet the challenges of the changing Arctic we will require your support and we welcome cooperation and collaboration with those who have recently become interested in the Arctic. We simply ask that you respect our culture and long history as residents of this beautiful region of the planet. And we ask that you consult with us before you try to re-invent the Arctic according to your own interests.

There are many issues that will challenge the indigenous peoples of the Arctic in the 21st century. We can use the good ideas and hard work of people from the south.

Peoples of the Arctic require jobs and livelihoods so they can continue to live where they have always lived. We welcome appropriate economic activity that respects the natural environment and includes Inuit in ways that support and respect our culture and our communities.

But if you want to help the Arctic, I also encourage you to think about what you need to do differently in the south---in the places where you live. Rather than suggesting to us how we should govern ourselves differently in the North, consider how your activities in the south are impacting us in the Arctic and make some adjustments closer to home.

I have four recommendations to leave with you:

- 1) Some of the challenges, like reducing the pace of climate change or the spread of trans-boundary pollutants, will require you to do more work at home because these problems are not being driven by activities in the Arctic.
- 2) Together we need to strengthen investments in research routed in a coproduction of knowledge and strengthen co-management structures to support to programmes of adaptation,
- 3) We need to increase the monitoring of Arctic biodiversity, bringing together Indigenous monitoring programs and traditional knowledge holders into Arctic Council monitoring programs - and to further promote cooperation with non-Arctic states that share responsibility for Arctic migratory wildlife.
- 4) We need to encourage the Arctic Council and the upcoming US Chairmanship to work towards an even more progressive role in ensuring the protection and sustainable use of the living natural resources in the Arctic, similar to its efforts in combating long-range transboundary pollutants

ICC is always interested in opportunities to develop partnerships and work in cooperative and collaborative ways. So I look forward to meeting many of you and discussing your interests in the Arctic at this Congress and into the future. And I look forward to working with you.

Thank you!

Okalik Eegeesiak