



INUIT

**ICC POSITION PAPER**  
**INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

**INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL**

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# ICC IPCC POSITION PAPER

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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Since the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) was founded in 1977 by the late Eben Hopson of Utqiagvik, Alaska, ICC has flourished and grown into a major international Indigenous Peoples' organization representing approximately 180,000 Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC strives to strengthen unity among Inuit of the Circumpolar; promote Inuit rights and interests at the international level; develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and seek full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of the Circumpolar North. The ICC represents the interests of Inuit and we have offices in four Arctic regions – Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. We are one people, in a single homeland, across four countries.

Established by the United Nations in 1988, the mandate of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on the current state of knowledge about climate change. The IPCC has 195 member states, and its assessments are the product of negotiations between governments. It is important to note that the IPCC does not conduct its own research but prepares comprehensive reviews and recommendations. Assessment reports provide the scientific basis for the continuing negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). ICC gained observer status at the IPCC in 2021 and continues to be the only Indigenous Peoples Organization that is an observer.

As declared by the Inuit of Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and Chukotka, on the occasion of the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the ICC in July 2022, the Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration mandates ICC to:

*30. Commit to actively use the ICC Observer status within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), including galvanizing support for Inuit knowledge holders to serve as substantive authors and contributors, and to advocate for an Indigenous Peoples' Expert and Indigenous Knowledge Holder Advisory Body to the IPCC.<sup>1</sup>*

Further, the recently released outcome document of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly states the need to “respect the distinct rights and status of Indigenous Peoples, consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international human rights instruments, such as conventions, treaties, and norms, acknowledging Indigenous Peoples as collective rights-holders...”<sup>2</sup>. This is the foundation of ICC's engagement in this forum, advocating for the rights and interests of Indigenous

<sup>1</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration: [ICC-2022-Ilulissat-Declaration-ENG.pdf \(iccalaska.org\)](https://www.iccalaska.org/ICC-2022-Ilulissat-Declaration-ENG.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Outcome Document, UNPFII, UNEMRIP, UNSRRIP: FAO Headquarters - Rome, Italy: February 2024.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/indigenouspeoples/sr/statements/outcome-document-rome-feb-2024-meeting-un-mechanisms-indigenous-peoples-rights.pdf>

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Peoples, the equitable and ethical use of Indigenous Knowledge and for the future of Inuit Nunaat, the circumpolar Inuit homeland.

With this direction, and guidance from the Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a starting point, this paper provides supporters of ICC, governments, activists, industry, academics, and others with guidance, calls to action, and a unified voice for Inuit engagement at the IPCC and the changes that need to occur. ICC was the first Indigenous Peoples Organization to be granted observer status at the IPCC and we look forward to seeing increased engagement of Indigenous Peoples in this space and a greater standard set for all IPCC authors, reviewers, co-chairs and others, moving forward.

## 2 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC)

The latest report was the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) which consisted of three Working Group contributions and a Synthesis Report.<sup>3</sup> The working groups were:

- Working Group 1 (WGI): The Physical Science Basis<sup>4</sup>
- Working Group 2 (WGII): Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability<sup>5</sup>
- Working Group 3 (WGIII): Mitigation of Climate Change<sup>6</sup>

Each assessment cycle consists of a report produced by each of the working groups as well as the development of special reports on selected topics. Three Special Reports were published during the previous AR6 cycle:

- Special Report of Global Warming of 1.5°C (October 2018)
- Special Report on Climate Change and Land (August 2019) and
- Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (September 2019).

The IPCC released its 6th Assessment Report Cycle (AR6) Synthesis Report and Summary for Policy

Makers following approval in Interlaken, Switzerland, in March 2023. That report was unequivocal in its statements about the state of the global climate system and what needs to be done” as rising greenhouse gas emissions push the world to the brink of irrevocable damage that only swift and drastic action can avert.” ICC participated in the AR6 process as a contributing author and expert reviewer. Additionally, ICC was present in Switzerland and contributed to and made statements emphasizing the importance of immediate

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<sup>3</sup> AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023. <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

<sup>4</sup> Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis: [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis | Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/)

<sup>5</sup> Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: [AR6 Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability — IPCC](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/)

<sup>6</sup> Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change: [AR6 Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change — IPCC](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/)

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action, and the need to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge were properly included in future IPCC reports.<sup>7</sup>

## 3 THE IPCC AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Since the IPCC process involves scientific assessment reports, it has been difficult for Indigenous Peoples to be heard and to make the argument that Indigenous Knowledge Systems have important contributions to make. ICC made inroads in respect to the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in the AR6 with contributions to the 2019 Special Report on Oceans and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. The report notes that “Considering indigenous knowledge and local knowledge facilitates cooperation in the development, identification, and decision-making processes for responding to climate change in communities across the Arctic, and better understanding of the challenges facing Indigenous peoples. This chapter incorporates published indigenous knowledge and local knowledge for assessing climate change impacts and responses.”<sup>8</sup> This includes the recognition and respect for Indigenous Knowledge as a distinct system of Knowledge, separate from the term ‘local knowledge’. Many of these additions were the result of advocacy and work by ICC and we see this as a step forward for the IPCC that other reports should use as a baseline to improve from.

There remains gaps, however, as the involvement of and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous led publications in IPCC reports is often left to the individual authors, many of whom lack an understanding or knowledge of the value of including diverse knowledge systems. More specifically, the idea that Indigenous Knowledge is not ‘peer reviewed’ that needs to be fundamentally changed. Indigenous Knowledge has its own peer reviewed process, built over millennia, that does not require validation from western science. Further, the IPCC does not look at the diversity of author teams, reviewers, or experts with regards to the participation of Indigenous Peoples, perpetuating the false dichotomy of developing versus developed countries. In addition, when Indigenous Peoples are nominated in the ‘global north’ they are often overlooked due to the number of experts nominated and the need for equity between the global ‘north and south’. This false dichotomy, is a major barrier to Indigenous Peoples’ involvement in these reports. Further, there is little transparency into how experts are selected for expert meetings and Indigenous Peoples Organizations should, at the very least, be consulted to ensure equitable participation.

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<sup>7</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council: Press Release. 2023. <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/news/climate-report-reinforces-inuit-message-to-the-world-act-now-before-its-too-late/>

<sup>8</sup> IPCC 2019. Special Report on Oceans and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), [Chapter 3: Polar Regions](#), pg. 209.

### 4 SEVENTH ASSESSMENT CYCLE—A STEP BACKWARDS?

In January 2024, the IPCC held its 60<sup>th</sup> meeting in Istanbul, Türkiye, and decided to proceed with a Seventh Assessment Report which includes the usual three working group reports plus a Special Report on Climate Change and Cities and a Methodology Report on Short-lived Climate Forcers. To date, Parties have been unable to agree to a detailed schedule of work. The IPCC is in the process of identifying experts for scoping, drafting and reviewing the reports.

The IPCC must provide the most up to date information to the UNFCCC for the next global stocktake. The 6<sup>th</sup> assessment reporting cycle was key to influencing the first global stocktake at COP28 and robust and updated reports should be available to inform the next one, including the equitable and ethical use of Indigenous Knowledge. ICC continued at this meeting as well as at IPCC61 in Sofia to call for the creation of an Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Body or Taskforce to help guide this work. Parties and observers alike have consistently raised the need to ensure the utilization of Indigenous Knowledge and this needs to be done with Indigenous Peoples, not in a siloed approach. ICC has highlighted that “Indigenous Peoples should not only be viewed as a vulnerable group, but as an equal partner in this work with an intimate Knowledge of our lands, waters, and ice. With the AR7, the IPCC has the chance to break new ground on the equitable and ethical utilization of Indigenous Knowledge.”<sup>9</sup>

### 5 BREAKING NEW GROUND

While ICC is encouraged by the progress made throughout the 6th Assessment cycle to include Indigenous Knowledge as well as the accelerated impacts of climate change in the Arctic and for Inuit, there remains much work to be done. The following recommendations and action steps are designed to move the Inuit, and more broadly, the Indigenous agenda forward.

Indigenous Peoples need to be equitably and ethically engaged in all research and policy that impacts them. As the IPCC 6th Assessment Report stated, “Meaningful participation and inclusive planning, informed by cultural values, Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge, and scientific knowledge can help address adaptation gaps and avoid maladaptation (high confidence).”<sup>10</sup> This applies as well to the Special Report on Cities that must include the meaningful engagement of Indigenous authors, experts, and Knowledge holders to ensure the North is not left behind. Special attention must be given to the Arctic, which is warming at a rate more than four faster than that of the rest of the planet, and how a Just Transition will impact Indigenous Peoples that call the Arctic home.

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<sup>9</sup> Lisa Koperqualuk, ICC Statement, IPCC 60, Istanbul, Türkiye, 17 January 2024.

<sup>10</sup> AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023.

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The IPCC must recognize that Indigenous Peoples hold a distinct status, and that all climate change work must be based on a strong human rights foundation including the rights affirmed through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. To avoid falling further behind, the IPCC needs to change its perspective and be open and flexible to ensure Indigenous Knowledge, rights, and values are meaningfully built into IPCC reports, which are central in national and international policy making.

### 6 CALLS TO ACTION

ICC calls on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to:

- Recognise and ethically and equitably include the Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples throughout their work and reports, including the recognition of Indigenous Knowledge as equal to western science, not requiring further validation or review. This could also include broadening the scope of materials used by authors, such as grey literature and reports led by Indigenous Peoples.
- Build on the progress in the last cycle and strike an Indigenous Peoples' Taskforce or Advisory Body to make recommendations and provide guidance throughout the 7th assessment cycle and beyond. The goal is to provide recommendations to the bureau on how to better utilize Indigenous Knowledge and to broaden the current governance of the IPCC to include designated seats for Indigenous Peoples' representatives. Any recommendations should be meaningfully implemented by the bureau throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> assessment cycle and fully operationalized before the beginning of the next cycle;
- Implement ICC's *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement* throughout the work and development of the Working Groups and Special Reports;
- Recognize and respect the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to self-determination, especially with regards to adaptation and mitigation efforts. The distinct and unique rights of Indigenous Peoples cannot be conflated with the term "local communities". This includes Indigenous Knowledge which needs to be recognized as separate and distinct from "local knowledge".
- Recognize the Arctic as a sensitive region, throughout reports, which is warming at a rate more than four times faster than that of the rest of the planet, and how a *Just and Equitable Transition* will impact Indigenous Peoples in their Arctic homelands. This includes ensuring the Arctic is recognized and examined specifically, especially in the Special Report on Climate Change and Cities, to ensure it is not left behind;
- Work in other forums such as the UNFCCC, GCF, GEF, CBD, IPBES, etc. to continue to call for the removal of the false dichotomy between the developing and developed world, and advocate for opportunities to establish a fund/climate finance mechanism that Inuit and all Indigenous Peoples in the so-called 'global north' may equitably access similar to climate vulnerable communities in non-G20 countries; and

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- Prioritize the nomination and selection of Indigenous Knowledge holders, experts, and representatives to attend and participate meaningfully in report scoping, authoring, and reviewing and expert meeting development and attendance.

### 7 NEXT STEPS

While achieving these recommendations will require a collective effort of the IPCC, experts and authors, civil society, and others, ICC will continue to advocate for these through:

- Continuing to garner support for and expand on ICC's portfolio of Indigenous Knowledge and Knowledge Holders in relation to climate change including highlighting, sharing, and publishing more Inuit-led research and reporting;
- Continuing to attend IPCC meetings, review all reports and papers, and to make best efforts to nominate Indigenous Knowledge holders, experts, and representatives to influence the IPCC process;
- Building a network of collaborators and allies to advance Inuit positions and Indigenous Peoples concerns in general;
- Continuing to identify funding opportunities to allow for the increased engagement of Inuit and Indigenous Peoples more broadly in this forum including equitable and direct access to climate finance mechanisms;
- Educating IPCC authors and experts in the equitable and ethical engagement of Inuit and use of Indigenous Knowledge and similarly building capacity across Inuit Nunaat on the IPCC process; and
- Continuing to participate in, advocate to join, or engage regularly with government delegations to ensure the Inuit voice is reflected in their positions going into IPCC meetings.