



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

International Experts Meeting

**Climate Change  
and Arctic Sustainable Development :  
scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges**

3-6 March 2009, Monaco

## **ABSTRACT: OCEANS, ICE AND ATMOSPHERE**

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### ***Concerns of Indigenous People in Response to the Effects of Climate Change***

I represent people whose understanding of the Arctic is based on the accumulated environmental observations of generations of Inupiat (Eskimos) living in the region. Our survival depends on our ability to harvest Arctic wildlife in their seasonal migrations. These migrations are endangered by environmental shifts associated with climate change, and we are deeply concerned about the long-term stability of Arctic wildlife species and the habitat that sustains them.

To speak of sustainable development in the Arctic seems a bit like putting the cart before the horse. The real question is, "What must we do to sustain the Arctic environment as we know it?" Economic development in the region represents an additional layer of questions and concerns beyond the primary challenge of climate change and its profound impacts. In fact, some of the greatest development opportunities arise from the most significant impacts of climate change, especially sea ice retreat.

A recent resurgence of interest in offshore oil and gas development in the Alaskan Arctic has brought us face-to-face with many issues. These include severe limits to the scientific understanding of various animal species and natural processes of the ocean environment. How can monitoring agencies effectively protect species without baseline data to use as a starting point of comparison? Other issues revolve around questions of process. Since the Inupiat bear virtually all of the long-term risk associated with Alaskan offshore oil and gas development, what is their appropriate role in decision-making related to planning, monitoring and mitigation requirements?

How do we find a proper balance between economic, socio-cultural and environmental concerns in the Arctic? I believe we need a number of policy changes to insure a safe and respectful approach to Arctic development, including:

- greater reliance on international standards and protocols;
- increased funding for baseline scientific research;
- policy mechanisms that guarantee a “place at the table” for indigenous residents of the Arctic;
- protection of indigenous subsistence uses as a top priority;
- better incorporation of the traditional knowledge of indigenous people in scientific research;
- funding to offset community dislocation in the Arctic due to storm damage, coastal erosion, degrading permafrost and other effects of climate change.

If the Arctic is a bellwether of global climate change impacts ahead, the region’s indigenous communities represent the human dimension of these challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed.